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✧ Covers ✧

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Don't forget to vote please! It really helps <33

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✧ Character Aesthetics ✧

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-[More are coming, all character and some background images are mine, others are from google.]-

✧ Key Vocabulary [For those who haven't read Warriors] ✧

[image]

Don't forget to vote please! It really helps <33

Twoleg Den/Nest: House

Monster: Car

Thunderpath: Road

Twoleg: Human

Sharptooth: cougar/ mountain lion/ puma

Stoneteller: leader and healer of the tribe (not the leader's actual name, but all leaders are called Stoneteller)

Tribe of endless hunting: ancestors who look down on the tribe, can communicate with Stoneteller.

To-be: young cat, older than a kitten but not fully grown. In training to become a Prey Hunter or Cave-Guard.

Caught-prey pile: dead prey to be eaten.

Prey hunter: hunter

Cave-guard: guard/warrior/protection for hunters from eagles

✧ Alliances ✧

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Alliances:

Tribe Of Rushing Water

Leader.

Stoneteller- Snow-white she-cat with icy blue eyes.

Prey hunters.

feather falling from bird- dark grey tomcat with orange eyes.

branch from fallen tree- dark brown tomcat with darker stripes and very green eyes.

Bush where mice hide- scruffy pelted toriosshell tomcat with orange eyes.

Morning Dew On Spiderweb- light grey she-cat with black speckles.

Night Of No Stars- jet black tomcat with yellow-green eyes.

Ripple in the river- Calico tomcat with light blue eyes.

Cave guards.

Wind that smells of pine- ginger she-cat with white splotches and pale green eyes.

Whitewater from waterfall- white she-cat with a black tail, ears, chest. yellow eyes.

Bird that lands in tall oak- dark brown tomcat with white patches and yellow eyes.

Ash from withering tree- grey tomcat with brown patches.

Leaf From Autumn Tree- A ginger-brown she-cat with amber eyes.

Low Hanging Ivy- Mottled she-cat with dark orange eyes.

to-bes.

Willow that shines at dawn- A dirty grey she-cat with dark patches on shoulders and hind with olive eyes.

Dandelion like the sun- golden tomcat with faint stripes, white chest and tailtip with light amber eyes.

Goose calling from afar- white tomcat with small ginger patches on his face and paws, blue eyes.

Thunderclan:

Leader.

Hazelstar- brown she-cat with red markings and yellow eyes.

Deputy.

Sandwhisker- Sandy she-cat with dark hazel eyes. faint stripes.

medicine cat.

Ravenshade- black she-cat with white stripes and chest, green eyes.

warriors.

Stormclaw- blue-grey tomcat with darker stripes, blue eyes.

Appletooth- senior dark brown tomcat with golden eyes.

Apprentice- Pouncepaw.

Tansyleap- Light brown she-cat with stripes, lighter markings and green eyes.

Tigerfern- medium brown she-cat with white and dark brown stripes with amber eyes.

Goosefern- fluffy white she-cat with green eyes.

Apprentice- Leafpaw

Olivewind- a white and light brown, small tomcat with unusual markings.

brambleheart- senior pale brown she-cat with dark orange eyes.

Apprentice- forestpaw

Fawnfeather- a red-brown she cat with white speckles and dark legs and ears. Almost white blue eyes.

Plumwhisker- Purple-grey She-cat with a dark backstripe and purple-blue eyes.

Cloudstorm- senior dark grey tomcat with amber eyes.

Apprentice- patterpaw

Redleaf- dark red-brown she-cat with blue eyes.

crowflight- jet black tomcat with dark hazel eyes.

ashtree- grey tomcat with yellow eyes.

Owlface- grey tomcat white a white face and underbelly and dark legs and tail.

Brindleskip- half tortoisshell half black she-cat with heterochromic eyes, one blue, one green.

Queens.

mothlight- pale cream she-cat with yellow eyes.

Kits- rosekit, yellowkit.

dawnheart- pale orange she-cat with green eyes.

Kit- Wolfkit.

Snowthistle- white she-cat with black speckles and cyan eyes.

Kits- Specklekit, Graykit, Whitekit.

Apprentices.

Pouncepaw- grey tomcat

with white markings and green eyes

Dovepaw- white she-cat with light grey markings and smoky blue eyes.

Leafpaw- grey-brown she-cat with green eyes.

Forestpaw- calico tomcat with amber eyes.

Patterpaw- tortoiseshell tomcat with blue eyes.

Kits.

Rosekit- light grey-brown she-kit with purple-blue eyes.

Yellowkit- yellow tomkit with pale yellow eyes.

Wolfkit- grey tomkit with dark stipes and white paws

Specklekit- White she-kit with black speckles and light blue eyes.

onionkit- Gray tomkit with dark leopardprints flecking his pelt with

orange eyes.

nightkit- Black she-kit with white paws, chest, and muzzle.

Elders.

featherdust- speckled gray she-cat.

Flamewing- bright ginger tomcat with a brown back and tail. Mint eyes.

Snowpool- white and grey speckled roan she-cat with mint eyes.

Darkstream- dark brown tomcat with stiff limbs and yellow eyes.

Antwater- scraggly brown tomcat with white and black speckles and orange eyes.

poppysun- calico she-cat with amber eyes.

[Only done these two so far, the rest will come with the release of book.]

✧ Prologue ✧

[image]

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A small, dusty grey she-cat, to-be sized, silently padded over an ancient path. The roar of water came close as she neared a corner.

Another cat followed her. A slightly larger, golden tomcat. They slid behind the waterfall, their pelts slightly misted by the spray. Ears lowered, they crept inside a dark, gaping hole. They shivered from the drizzle, dropping softly onto their backs from the ceiling of the cave. The sound of fur on time-old stone could be heard from deeper within the cave. Small murmurs were caught in the hairs of their ears. They froze, before continuing. The she-cat led the way to a small indent in the ground, a smooth, hollowed-out shape in the stone, carved from many bodies lying on it for seasons upon seasons. The distant lightning crackled in the sky as birds were waking up. They slithered inside and curled together, trying to hold back their smiles. As they relaxed into each other, they heard heavy paw steps echoing throughout the cave. Their eyes shot open. The hairs along their spine prickled, and their hackles raised. Their eyes widened in pure terror as they leapt up and raced towards the walls of the cave, and scrambled to a nearby ledge. In the gloom, they waited for something to happen. A sound, a movement. Anything. Then, thunder boomed in the distance, and lightning flashed light across the cave. Two huge orange eyes were made out near the entrance of the cave.

"It must have followed us!" The tom whispered, terrified. The she-cat stared at him for a moment, before screeching as loud as her small lungs could,

"SHARPTOOTH!"

[image]

✧ Chapter 1 ✧

[image]

Don't forget to vote please! It really helps <33

Willow that Shines at Dawn sighed, crouching by the caught prey pile. Her olive eyes were clouded with grief, and guilt swarmed over her as she remembered the night before last. So many cats were gone. Even the prey-hunters had joined the fight. She vividly remembered Dandelion Like the Sun's mother, Wind that Smells of Pine, a cave guard, fighting in front of them against Sharptooth, while they fled from the terror they had accidentally caused. She whimpered with guilt. She had now introduced Sharptooth to the cave, the one place the tribe had always tried to keep a secret for seasons and seasons. She had ruined everything. Dandelion came over, and crouched beside her, pressing his nose into her neck fur. He knew she was hurt, as his mother was like a second mother to her. When her own mother died, a moon after she was born, it was Wind that looked after her. She pressed her head into him and lifted it again when she saw Stoneteller walking over to them. She lowered her gaze in respect, and worry. *What is she going to say?*

"Willow, Dandelion. Follow me to my den." She walked away, flicking her tail for them to follow. The two young cats followed slowly; their paws timed together perfectly. As they neared Stoneteller's cave, they sped up, not wanting to be seen by other tribe members.

"Whose idea was it to sneak out at night with no protection?" Stoneteller sounded tired. Grief was taking its toll on everyone, it seemed.

"Mine." Dandelion answered immediately.

"Hang on a minute- "Willow tried to interrupt but Stoneteller flicked her tail for her to be silent. She obeyed, not because she should, but because she was shocked by Dandelion's answer. It wasn't even true.

She had begged him to have a little fun, and he had come along hesitantly. Only it hadn't turned out fun at all.

Stoneteller had sent her out, and Willow sat outside her cave while she talked with Dandelion. She looked around guiltily, cats casting her glances as they padded past. Hissing whispers between them made her fur prickle. Suddenly they both appeared and she stepped back. She was deaf to Stoneteller's call for a tribe meeting. Dandelion nudged her down the half-slope. His gaze was blank.

"A member of the tribe will be leaving us today." Gasps were heard throughout the tribe, but none as loud as Willow's.

What? This can't be happening! She thought as she pressed into Dandelion.

"Dandelion, step forward."

"Dandelion, no! Please you know it was my idea. Dandelion, stop!" She whispered at him as he walked up to Stoneteller.

"Dandelion Like the Sun, you have proven to be selfish, and unintelligent. You led Willow out under the cover of darkness and left a trail for Sharptooth. We cannot have cats like you in our tribe. Therefore, I must banish you. You are to leave by sun-high. You may eat, say your goodbyes and leave. If you are seen by a tribe member, you will be treated like an outsider."

Willow sobbed as Dandelion dipped his head. They were both so young. Everyone makes mistakes. Suddenly she stood up, subconsciously.

"Then I am leaving the tribe." Shocked murmurs spread through the crowd as she continued.

"I will leave with him, and you will all be dead to me." A wave of gasps flowed through the crowd at her fierce words, and Dandelion padded forward, the crowd separating a path as they scrambled away from him, as If he were dangerous. He ignored them, his soft yellow eyes questioning.

"Willow, what are you doing? You can't do this, stay with the tribe!"

"I have made my decision. I'm coming with you, wherever you go. I will always follow you." Her eyes searched his as they stood face to face. They turned around to go say goodbye to their fathers and Dandelion's older sister, Leaf from Autumn Tree.

They all ate together, in mournful silence.

Stoneteller's voice sounded from across the cave. Dandelion got up, and she did the same. Willow pressed her face into Feather Falling from Bird's shoulder, her father. He sighed.

"You don't have to go..."

"I know." She replied sadly. "But I can't leave dandelion on his own..."

"I know." He pulled away and looked into her olive eyes.

"Your mother would be proud of you." Willow squinted at him as her eyes watered, and she knew the same was happening for him. They embraced one last time, before turning away from him with Dandelion. Together they walked to the entrance. Lots of encouraging mews came from the crowd, and Dandelion dipped his head earnestly. Willow sniffed at them and held her head high.

Sure, they were being nice now, but they didn't exactly object to their banishment. She resented those whom she once loved. She didn't want to, but she knew she had to if she was to survive. They arrived at the entrance. Stoneteller dipped her head at them, seeming sorrowful. She stared at Willow with purpose.

"Good luck out there, both of you." She pressed her nose to Dandelion and spoke softly, almost too soft for Willow to hear but she caught some of it.

"I'm sorry. I must tell you, that you...

...Without...

...Hide...

...Give up...

...Please...

...Purpose..." She couldn't hear the rest and Dandelion's expression was unreadable. Stoneteller turned to her. She came close and whispered something to Willow that sent shivers down her spine.

"Willow is strong and flexible. But what can be bent, can be broken. Be careful, and no matter what, do not break. Your future awaits." Stoneteller's ice-blue eyes shone against her white fur and her voice shook as if she was scared, but the gleam in her eyes was anything but fear. It scared her, and Willow backed away.

Was that a prophecy?

Stoneteller shook out her snow-coloured fur and looked at them both. "May the tribe of endless hunting watch over you both, guide your paws, and send you good hunting. Good luck." Willow glanced around and saw nothing but her father, standing alone. He didn't have anyone now. He didn't have a purpose other than to hunt for the tribe. After her mother and sister died, she was all he had. She was leaving him with nothing. Her heart burst for him, but she couldn't go back now. She lifted her tail for him, and a smile spread across his face.

He raised his tail, the quietest yet most painful goodbye. With that, both Dandelion and herself walked out into the spring night.

[image]

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✧ Chapter 2 ✧

[image]

Don't forget to vote please! It really helps <33

Willow opened her eyes to the quiet light of dawn and the gentle pattering of rain on stone. She saw Dandelion sitting by the entrance to the small hollow they found last night. The same hollow they curled together in, shivering after their tribe banished them. Resentment swam through her veins. His back toward her, he twitched his ears as she stood up and stretched. Her stomach rumbled. Before finding somewhere to sleep, Dandelion had caught a vole, which they shared. She looked at Dandelion, who was sat by the entrance, his ears pricked as he kept watch. Suddenly he turned tail, bounded towards her and shoved her roughly to the back wall of the unfinished burrow.

"Hey, what the- " His paw slammed into her mouth, and her head hit the wall. She wondered if he had gone crazy.

She was about to ask him what in the stars he was doing when he turned to her, and she saw urgency in his expression. When he slowly pressed on her back, she crouched next to him, and they stayed quiet. Suddenly, only a moment later paw steps were heard above their heads.

"I smell prey!" Dandelion's eyes widened. "And Branch!" Branch From Fallen Tree was a slightly older friend of theirs, around two moons difference. They were kits and to-be's together, and only a moon ago he turned into a full prey hunter.

"Let's go say hi!" Ears pricked, Dandelion bounded forward, and Willow leaped onto his hindquarters, and brought him down as quietly as she could.

"What do you think you're doing?!" She gasped. "We're outsiders

now, remember? They'll hurt us!"

"Branch wouldn't hurt us..." he sounded sure, but his eyes told another story.

"I'm afraid he'd have to." Willow sighed. She thought. An idea sparked behind her eyes. "How many do you think there are?" She asked him urgently. Dandelion didn't look ready for such an eagerness from her and answered slowly.

"Uh... I don't know..." he listened for a moment. "I can only hear one set of paws, but there might be more. Why?" He sounded wary and looked at her suspiciously.

"I have an idea. You hungry?" She stared at him as understanding swarmed his gaze.

"Let's do it." Now feeling light, they crept outside and blinked in the light of dawn behind a bush.

"Are you ready?" Willow asked him, her eyes had been searching him since they left. His gaze was unusually sombre. Of course, he had just been banished by his tribe, but the look in his eyes was something different.

"Of course." They separated, going diverse ways. The wind blew from Branch to them, giving the scent of one other cat, but the other cat was out of sight. They continued, sneaking around him so they were on opposite sides. She saw a golden-sand-coloured tail lift from behind a rock. That was her signal to pounce. With a threatening yowl, she leapt onto Branch's back and brought him down with surprising ease. Branch screeched and flailed, not knowing what was attacking him. Dandelion helped her pin him down, and they held him there. He stopped wriggling. She remembered the fights in the nursery, and how he pinned her and won every play fight. Why was he so easy to beat now?

The mud plastered to his fur rubbed off on her as she pushed him down while Dandelion fetched the eagle he caught.

Impressive catch, she thought. While Dandelion headed in the

opposite direction to the hollow, did a circle back and dropped it off, Branch's green eyes flitted up to her. He was panting when he breathed,

"Willow?" His eyes widened in surprise, then narrowed in confusion.

"Not forgotten me yet?" She snarled at his face, half surprised at her tone and the level of resentment she had for a cat who she once believed to one day become her mate. She looked into his eyes as much as he could, and she realised they looked misty and dark. She found it difficult to look away as old fantasies were scattered throughout her mind while Branch sighed and blinked at her. She backed away. Branch scrambled to his feet.

"Who was that other cat?" He asked, "Was that Dandelion?"

"Uh, no." She had to protect him.

"A rogue I met. Dandelion's out hunting." Dandelion made an appearance through some bushes and stopped dead with moon-wide eyes when he saw him unpinned. He rushed over to her side.

"What's wrong, did he hurt you?" He gave her a quick lick on her shoulder.

"Out hunting, I see." But his eyes were wide and excited.
"Dandelion, I must talk with you!" he took a pace closer. "Please, it's important."

Dandelion looked down, his eyes and ears lowered. His eyebrows twitched as he made a decision, and he stood tall, his head high. He was sure of his answer.

"No."

"What?"

"No."

"Listen Dandelion you don't understand." Branch tried to plead with him, but he was silenced quickly.

"We don't need to hear anything you have to say. We were BANISHED, REMEMBER?" He spoke softly, then harshly, a snarl in his voice. Willow hadn't seen this side of him before. He was always so chilled. The atmosphere had changed drastically since inside the tunnel when Dandelion had been excited to see him.

"And now we're gone, you've realised how much you need us. Well, it's too late now. Go away now, before I get angry." Dandelion stared hard at Branch's face, but Branch didn't give up.

"Dandelion please you've got to-" Branch leaped back, one eye squinting, the other wide in disbelief. A slash under Branch's eye oozed bright crimson blood. Willow turned to dandelion slowly. He was panting with aggression, his paw still raised. Blood tipped his claws.

"Give the tribe a message for me: You are all dead to us. We will never return, and we will NEVER forgive you." Dandelion gave Branch an aggressive jerk of his head, assigning him to leave. Branch stared at Willow hopelessly.

"I wish you both the best." He mumbled, before pushing his way through the bushes, tail trailing after him.

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✧ Chapter 3 ✧

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Don't forget to vote please! It really helps <33

Dandelion had been silent while eating the eagle and the day-long journey to find somewhere new. They had trekked through the mountains for hours on end. She had caught a mountain hare, and Dandelion had caught a shrew. They kept the shrew for later, carrying it until they got into eagle territory to use as bait. The breeze blew their fur the wrong way, and dandelion turned to her.

"I'm sorry for behaving like that to Branch. I... I know you like or liked him..." He looked at his paws as they continued along a Rocky path winding down a mountain.

"It's just... they can't banish us and then expect us to still want to be friends... "

"No, I... I haven't liked him for a long time. You were... you were right to act like that. He needed to know this isn't a joke. It's our life on the line. You... you did the right thing... just... I just wasn't expecting it... from you."

Dandelion looked at her, his amber eyes warm like sunlight on water.

"Yes, I know, it wasn't like me but... he... they..." he stammered as he was lost in emotion.

"They had to know; I know." She spoke for him, and he blinked at her and nodded.

They padded onwards in silence, small rocks crumbling under their feet as they trekked across the mountainscape. They were looking

for a place to stay the night, as the stars weakly blinked in the darkening sky, which was turning a scarlet blue, with iron-grey clouds stalking from the horizon. The distant rolling of thunder shattered the silence, as rain started tapping a hollow song on stone. After going further down the mountain, they approached a forest. They entered; tails entwined in fear of the dark trunks looming over them. After walking for a while, avoiding stinking badger holes, they crawled into a shallow hollow under some rocks, digging slightly to make enough room for the both of them. They curled together, and quietly shared tongues, reviving old memories of before.

Willow started awake, and her fur rose. She must have dosed off. She looked at Dandelion and saw his bright, wide, and terrified eyes staring at the mouth of the hollow. He laid his tail along her spine, and she felt her skin prickle.

What was he looking at? What had he seen or heard? Why am I on edge? Her questions were answered by a loud thump as two great grey paws thumped down from the top of the mound. They heard the heavy inhaling of a huge, much larger... cat. Lightning flashed and lit up the sky, and they saw the muscular rocky grey pelt of Sharptooth. Rain pattered outside, dripping from the entrance. They knew it was too dark in the tunnel for it to possibly see them... right? They edged to the back of the tunnel until fur brushed fur on dirt.

A chin appeared at the entrance. A mouth. Whiskers. Eyes. The mountain lion gave a huge sniff, and its pupils dilated. It turned away, and she heard the paw steps recede into nothing other than the heavy rain. A small stream trickled into the tunnel, and they stood up. Willow crept forward, sniffing warily, and flinching from every larger raindrop plop. The rain pounded harder, and she turned back to Dandelion, when she realised he had been signalling her to come back.

"I think it's gone." She whispered, and visibly relaxed. Dandelion padded forward. Willow took a step outside, when a huge, snarling lump of muscle landed on her, knocking the breath out of her. She

buckled under the huge weight, and Dandelion shot back, screeching in surprise. But as soon as he gained his footing he pushed himself off the wall and flung himself at the Sharptooth with a caterwaul. He couldn't budge the huge beast, but it distracted it enough for Willow to struggle from its grip. She screeched as its talon-like claws ripped along the side of her spine. She staggered away, turning around, to see the Sharptooth gripping onto Dandelion's leg, and he screeched furiously, clawing at its eyes. It's claws tore at his chest. She galloped forward, her fur standing on end in adrenaline and anger. She unleashed herself on it, a flurry of claws and teeth. It released Dandelion and chased her around the clearing. She could see in the corner of her eye Dandelion limping and struggling into a bush.

"RUN DANDELION, RUN!" She didn't want him to see what might become of her if it caught her. When Dandelion was out of sight, she felt herself slowing down. She panicked and tried to run faster but her legs couldn't go keep up.

She realised she hadn't been running for her life, but for his. Her heart drummed in her ears, and she could barely breathe. A new surge of energy came to her.

You left the tribe for Dandelion. You left your home, your family. He needs you. You need him. Don't make him walk this path alone. One more run, come on Willow!

She drove on harder, her paws pounding on the earth. She was widening the gap between herself and Sharptooth.

Maybe I'll make it! She gasped for air and was running towards a tree, hoping to leap into one of its branches, but her paw caught on a root, and she toppled down, her paw twisting around under her, making a terrible crunching sound. Letting out a screech, she curled into a ball, whimpering as she heard paws thumping closer, speeding up.

I'll never get away now... I'm sorry Dandelion.

She looked up to see flaming orange eyes, and a gaping mouth coming at her.

I'm so sorry. As the needle-sharp canines gripped her, she closed her eyes and after a bright, blue-white light, the world went black.

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✧ Chapter 4 ✧

[image]

Don't forget to vote please! It really helps <33

Willow was walking outside, in a field of flowers. She saw two she-cats, their bellies round. One was a white and ginger, and one was white. For some reason, she knew their names. Wind that Smells of Pine, and Pebble that Rolls Down Cliff. She looked around and saw a dark grey tomcat. She also somehow knew his name, Feather Falling From Bird. He looked back to the pregnant soon-to-be mothers, sharing tongues in a cloud of daisies, butterflies flitting around them. They looked into each other's eyes with the love of friendship. The memory changed, and she now saw three tiny, squirming bundles. She smiled at the mewing kits, who were dark grey and white, light grey and a golden brown. Their eyes weren't even open yet, but she could see the love everybody had for each other. She felt sad but couldn't understand why. She watched the white she-cat wheeze, and a cough wracked the lithe dark grey kit's body. She crouched to give it a lick, but the memory changed before she could do so. She was at an entrance to a cave, and she watched as two thin cats were laid to rest in a hole, by a tree near the river. One was a tiny dark grey and white kit, and one was a dirty white cat. She turned back to the cave, to see two kits stumbling towards the cave entrance. They weren't allowed out, but they sat at the entrance, pressing into each other. She watched from behind as the golden tom-kit wrapped his short tail around her back. The she-kit pressed her forehead into him. *That poor kit...* she thought as she saw the unhappiness in the posture of the grey kitten. She then froze.

Wait... who are these kits? She padded closer,

"Hey, what're your names?" She called out to them. Their ears didn't twitch. Were they asleep? She padded infront of them, and a volt of

confusion shot through her when she saw their eyes open, looking at the cats in silence and very much awake.

She raised a paw to their faces, and they didn't respond.

"Hey!" She tried to give the tom a gentle push, but gasped and scrambled away when her paw slipped through him. He didn't move. She panted, anxiety ripping through her chest. "What... what is this... wait..." She backed away.

"This... this isn't real." She bounded over to the other cats, yelling franticly.

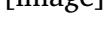
"Hey! Hey! Anybody? Hey, I'm here! It's me, hello?" She lost her breath when a cat padded through her. She watched them walk away while three cats stayed to cover the cats in the grave. They all walked past the kits, who looked up at the cats as they passed. The dark grey tomcat and the ginger and white she-cat stopped by them and murmured something to them before padding back inside. The ginger she-cat flicked them both with her tail gently and followed the tom inside. Her attention was back on the kits. She stared at them, hard. Those golden eyes... she knew them... the stripes on the tomcat were familiar. She looked at the she-kit, who was snuffling sadly. She knew her from somewhere, and yet she didn't remember this.

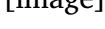
Wait... Is that.... me? She stepped back, her pulse reverberated under her skin.

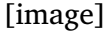
How could it be? I'm me... I can't be her... she can't be.... can she? She panicked and walked backwards as the kits started to go inside.

That mark on her lower back, that shoulder splotch... thats mine! But it can't be... she kept walking, panting, and confused. Suddenly the ground from under her feet disappeared, and she was engulfed by cold, swirling water. Water filled her eyes, her ears, her lungs, and she couldn't tell up from down, and couldn't reach the surface.

No! Please, not again. I have to find Dandelion!.. Darkness consumed her, and she could no longer fight back.







✧ Chapter 5 ✧

[image]

Don't forget to vote please! It really helps <33

Willow squinted open her eyes, her ears painfully twitching as a crow cawed surprisingly close to her ears. She felt a harsh peck on her hind, and she yelped in shock and pain, and scrambled ungracefully to her paws, lasting only a heartbeat before buckling and rolling onto her side. the crows screeched, laughing, and flapped away, unfazed. Her fur smudged against half dried blood, which surrounded her in a circle, a tail length in radius. She moaned painfully, turning her head to look at her body. Her eyes widened in surprise and horror at her dismantled body.

I should be dead. she thought to herself, and she dropped her head limply onto the ground, scenting her own blood.

Why aren't I?.. She thought back to what happened.

Dandelion! She pulled herself up, clamping her jaw shut to stop herself from screeching in agony. She blinked as her back legs lay limply, and her front legs shook from bearing her weight.

How long have I been laying here? Where's Dandelion... then the dizziness hit. She dropped to the floor like a dead weight.

She was awake before she knew she was, pushing herself up on one paw. She looked in anguish at her right paw. It was twisted around, in a way that seemed locked in position. She turned to look at the state of her body. Covered in blood. Coated in it. Her left back leg was torn to shreds, but she could wiggle her toes.

Nothing broken there then. She turned her head the other way. Her right side of her body had bits of tissue and muscle hanging from her body, and parts of her pelt lay across the grass, flung from the sharptooth's claws. A claw was hanging loosely from a toe on her

twisted paw. *Must have caught on the root.* She looked around for the root, and her back thigh brushed on a rock, and she screeched out in pain, spinning around, teeth bared, ready to fight for the life she nearly lost. She saw nothing, only a rock. She twisted her head around more, a huge, pink/red hole with blackened dried blood encrusted around the edges revealed itself. It was just there. She hadn't even noticed. What a mess. She cried inside. She looked around for the root and saw it about eight tail lengths away.

Must have been thrown around. She guessed. She struggled to her feet, barely, muffling her screeches with her teeth. The birds who were watching in amusement flew away, mimicking her cries. her legs wobbled drastically, and she managed to sit.

One bit at a time. Her stomach rumbled, and she felt hollow. She realised the sun was beginning to dip. She had been there for more then a day, she guessed. She looked over to her cold muscle and tissue left on the ground. She felt sick. But she knew there was only one way she was to stay alive. She needed to eat. And she was in no state to hunt. She dragged herself over to a small lump of limp, cold muscle. She didn't look at the clots of blood encrusting the edges. She fought the urge to vomit and set her teeth in it. Her own cold blood flooded her mouth, and her eyes watered as she chewed, and swallowed. She felt it slide into her empty stomach. She took another bite, realising just how hungry she was. After finishing one lump, she fought against her hunger to not eat another lump of body, and to save it for later, knowing she wouldn't be hunting anytime soon. She lay where she was, sighing. *I will find you Dandelion. I promise you, wherever you are.*

I will find you.

In this world, or another.

[image]

[image]

[image]

✧ Chapter 6 ✧

[image]

Don't forget to vote please! It really helps <33

Willow was sat underneath the moon and stars, wondering where Dandelion could be. An owl hooted, his call ringing across the forest. Another call answered, calling out desperately for its love. Willow thought about Dandelion, beginning to believe he was gone. Her wounds had already started to heal, and she could now hobble around. Her paw was still twisted around, and she had to limp everywhere. She had managed to catch a shrew and two baby mice. A well as her own muscle, that's all she had eaten in the last week. She settled down, feeling like her life was taking a turn for the good. But she missed Dandelion. She closed her eyes.

Willow hobbled determinedly over to the root, which was thick, curving out of the ground like a rainbow before digging back in. She grabbed it in her teeth and tugged it with all her body weight. It didn't budge. She growled in determination, and fear that she was doing the wrong thing. She sucked in a breath and wedged her twisted paw underneath the root where it was closest to the ground. She pulled gently, wincing.

The root held her paw fast. She was stood in front of the root, her hindquarters brushing it, her paw pulled under her stomach. She inhaled sharply, before hopping on three paws, and she turned her body slightly to the side and ground her teeth together.

Ancestors, help me. She begged through gritted teeth as she turned only a claw-length more, and screeched in agony as her foot refused to move. *Please!* A gust of wind blew from the other direction, forcing her back to where she was. She paused for a moment, staring down at her paw. She noticed, that not only was her paw twisted, but tilted. She narrowed her eyes and turned the other way. It turned with her, and she growled in frustration and wedged

it in harder. Grinding her teeth, she jerked her body to the side and moaned in torment. She went back to her starting place, gasping for breath. Her chest felt tight. She didn't have enough energy or strength for this. But she knew she couldn't give up. She pulled on her paw slightly, wincing, before letting out a cry as she tugged it a little further to the side. She was at an awkward angle, and fought to not fall and rip off her paw. She went back again. Hobbling on three legs going around a point was hard, and she panted in affliction and tiredness. Her ankle burned, it felt unbelievably tender at every movement. She breathed in and gritted her teeth as she jerked to the side, now halfway there. she whimpered from the stabbing ache and went back to her starting point.

"Come on Willow! Please, you can do this..." she reached over and got a small stick. Splinters pricked her tongue, and she shut her jaws tightly on it, and tugged more, twisting her paw until she felt a limit. The stick completely splintered in her mouth, and she spat it out. She pulled gently and felt something stopping her from twisting any further.

The bone. Determination set like concrete in her mind and she pulled to where she was again. She growled and clamped her jaws shut. She crouched, and counted down, and an image of Dandelion flashed across her mind, and it empowered her. She snarled and twisted her whole body with such a force, a loud scraping click was heard, and she shrieked at the excruciating pain, and collapsed. Panting hard, she lifted her head and looked back at her paw. It was swelling madly, faster then nightfall sneaks up on a lone cat. But it was facing forwards. She anxiously yanked out her paw, ignoring the pain and examined it. Except for the swelling, and loose claw, it looked normal. She stood on three paws, and hesitantly put her paw on the ground. Her eyes were watering from the pain, but blinked the tears away. She set it on the ground, took a step forward and toppled over.

Damn. She thought to herself. It didn't hurt too badly anymore, but it was weak, and couldn't be used for a few days in the least. She limped over to the rock, and studied her paw with an odd feeling of love and pride.

[image]

✧ Chapter 7 ✧

[image]

Don't forget to vote please! It really helps <33

Birds were singing loudly, and the trees swayed gently in the warm breeze. The sun hesitated, peeking over the horizon as it cast a crimson glow across the sky. A lean, dusky grey cat limped over the grass, a young hare hanging limply from her jaws. She had begun to hunt early in the morning, and turns out that only a minute's walk away there was a stream, which had presumably been frozen during the winter.

She settled down and tucked into her breakfast. After finishing, she stretched out on her back, legs trembling. She lay on her back, purring, eyes slit. She felt completely at home and relaxed here. She had never scented badger, or fox, and had never caught sight of a single eagle. There were no predators but her. She was top of the food chain.

Unless the mice go on strike. She chuckled to herself, and sat up, yawning widely. An image of Dandelion flitted behind her eyes, and a flash of guilt wormed around her stomach.

I should be looking for him. She thought remorsefully.

I mean, he hasn't found me.. maybe he... she shook her head.

No. He's out there. And I'm going to find him. She narrowed her eyes and made a plan. She would gather some prey, and take it with her to look for him. She would retrace her steps, and she would find him, she had to. She cast a quick glance at her paw, which was still sore. She wrinkled her nose in disdain, and packed herself into a loaf, watching the sky go from blood red to orange, to yellow, to white spotted cornflower.

A telltale trickling made her mouth water, and despite the heat she trotted, her ears pricked. Shaded by most of the trees' luscious branches, she crouched down and lapped at the water greedily, her tender paw was generously cushioned by moss. Suddenly, a plop sounded next to her face. Leaping back in surprise as her face was now sprinkled with water, she caught sight of kicking, naked legs. Ears pricked with curiosity, she stalked forward, peering into the water. She saw nothing. Just a cloud of mud rising to the surface like a mushroom. *Weird.* She walked away to another part of the stream, with clear water running over pebbles smoothly. She began to sip from the stream once more, eyeing the water, hoping to see the mysterious creature again. She didn't. On her way back, she had to leap from tree-base to tree-base, trying to keep in the shade. She looked at her clearing. Out in the sun. She walked over, eyes droopy through the haze. She leaned on the smooth rock, pushing it towards the trees. It was exhausting, but she got it under the shade and propped herself against it as she panted.

Her wounds were all pretty much healed, just scars reminded her of the experience, but she had been getting short of breath very easily, more then she used to. She guessed during the ordeal, her chest must have pounded pretty hard on the ground, perhaps injuring her lungs. She guessed nothing could be done, and just had to continue with her life, working her way around the problem. She had learned to live with it. She lay down, pressing against the rock and flattening herself against the cooler ground, and she shut her eyes.

[image]

[image]

[image]

✧ Chapter 8 ✧

[image]

Don't forget to vote please! It really helps <33

Willow was panting heavily, dragging every step. A rabbit lay across her shoulders, needing to hold open her mouth in the heat. She had been travelling for days, retracing her steps, hoping to find the same tunnel she and Dandelion were separated at. Her eyes watered, and she blinked away the tears. Her head hung low. She hadn't found a single drop of water in days. She could barely make up ten tail-lengths in front of her, due to the haze. She swayed groggily on her paws and stopped as she saw a small dip in the ground. She pricked her ears, tumbling forward unsteadily, the hare dropping with an unheard thud. She sniffed desperately at the dusty ground. Growling with frustration and exhaustion. She collapsed in the dip, tongue lolling limply from her mouth. She breathed shallowly, eyes slit, unseeingly staring ahead. She closed her eyes, trying to feel her twitching body. She passed out.

With a hoarse gasp, Willow jerked her head up, and stared around, struggling to see.

Am I blind? She started to panic, and stood, staring desperately around. She raised a paw in front of herself, and whimpered, crouching, feeling watched.

"Help me..." she whined, and shut her eyes as a bright blast of icy white shot across the earth, and she looked up, squinting at the light.

The moon. She sighed in relief, and realised it was cool. Not just cool, it felt *cold.* She stood and looked around for her rabbit. She was hungry now, she had been saving it for when she needed it, and when she found it, with ease, she wrinkled her nose and backed away. It stank of death and rot. It had baked in the sun. She ignored

her rumbling stomach and started walking in the direction she had been travelling in. She walked, mostly blindly as the clouds hid her guiding light, and she often stumbled and tripped on unknown inanimate objects. She made slow progress, each step taken with careful hesitation. She stopped for a break, and heard an owl hoot. She had only heard an owl once before, while looking at the stars but had never seen one, and looked up at the trees with curiosity. She pricked her ears, hoping to hear it again. She didn't, but saw huge, orange eyes that reminded her of Sharptooth. She shivered, and felt another pair of eyes watching her, and she spun around, pelt prickling. When she saw nothing, she looked back for the eyes. They were gone. her spine prickled ominously, and she carried on walking into the night.

[image]

✧ Chapter 9 ✧

[image]

Don't forget to vote please! It really helps <33

There was no chirpy singing of birds. There was no trickling of water. There was no rain. There was no prey. Only nighttime walks, and an endless haze, blurring the horizon. Yawning, Willow stayed in the safety of the shade, given by the trees, who's own leaves were turning brown and bare. She looked around. She had grown incredibly thin, and she hadn't seen any prey for days. She had caught a half-dead mouse, found a mainly mud puddle, and drank every bit of moisture she could get. She had begun to travel at night, as it was far too hot to travel during the day. It was never this hot with the tribe of rushing water.

I must have travelled a long way. She thought, rather mournfully. She sighed. Her pelt was dirty, and full of debris, but she couldn't waste any of her moisture by cleaning her pelt. It didn't need to be clean. No one was going to see her. She was alone. She rested her head on the ground, but found no cooling comfort in the sun-baked earth. She closed her eyes.

She opened her eyes to a flattering sound, and a high-pitched squeal. A small, dark shadow flew across the stars, silhouetted. She stood, and yawned. Her eyes had slowly started to adjust to the darkness more, and her nerves could tell if a dip in the ground was coming, based on the texture and strength of the earth she walked on. She sat for a minute, ears pricked, and eyes wide, staring into the darkness, waiting for her eyes to adjust as much as they can, before she stood, and started padding away from the safety of the treeline. She could just make out the fronds of decaying leaves near her, and huge trees blocking out the stars. She shivered slightly, even though the night gave a warm breeze, it was cold without the sun. She stood on a stone, and it was still warm, well past moon high. She sighed.

Will I ever get out of this place? She exhaled.

Did dandelion? She stopped in her tracks.

He may have escaped the Sharptooth, but did he make it out of ***here?***

She trembled, and walked on. Her heart hurt, a stabbing pain she couldn't see. She continued walking, and broke out into a run when she heard a rustle from the ferns behind her, briefly startling her. She had previously caught scent of a foul-smelling odour, from some kind of animal. It had sent shivers down her spine, and had changed her direction slightly, not exactly hoping to encounter the animal.

Birds were waking, and beginning their quiet, lone songs. Most birds daren't sing, as a waste of energy it is in the hot daytime. Dawn began to dust away the slowly sinking stars, and the fading moon began to hide, the sky lightening into a clear ocean blue. Looking around, she noticed it wasn't as hot, and she began to realise it wasn't as hot as the early morning usually was, and continued walking, despite her devastatingly shredded paw-pads. A caw of a crow caught her attention after another half an hour of walking, and she stooped and peered around. She heard it again, mimicked by another. She ran forward, seeing three crows crowded around a decaying... creature. It had long, slender legs, and a long neck with a thin head. It had a dark nose, golden pelt with lighter underbelly, stumpy tail and strange dark, shiny, flat feet. She stared in amazement at the huge creature, but her attention was soon back to the plump crows.

I'll end up like that animal if I don't eat or drink soon. She thought and gave her best stalk, shadows flecking her pelt. Her gaze and focus were fixed on the closest, and thankfully, largest crow. She bunched her muscles, and leaped onto the back of the crow, trying to flatten it with her body. It wriggled, and realised it was stronger than she was. She was slapped in the face by a beating wing and scrambled to her paws as it took off. A new surge of energy hit her, a new sense of adrenaline, and she took a flying leap into the air, her claw catching its wing, pulling it down with her. She landed with a painful thump but threw herself on it as it tried to flap woefully away. She quickly shoved her nose through the feathers at the base of its neck, and it squawked loudly as her teeth set into its juicy flesh. Warm blood dripped down her chin, and she held on tightly,

as she clamped her jaws down on its neck while it cried out quietly, before falling limp in her mouth.

Thank you, Tribe of Endless Hunting for this prey. She mumbled and dragged it into the shade, barely containing herself from ripping the corpse apart and consuming it whole. She crouched in the shade, panting from the chase, and started patiently plucking it until it was naked. She set her canines into the flesh on its plump chest. Although it wasn't as tasty as eagle, it seemed delicious to her dry stomach, and she ate everything but the guts. After her meal, feeling full and hydrated from the crow's blood, she slept in the heat peacefully, only disturbed by the jealous flies.

[image]

✧ Chapter 10 ✧

[image]

Don't forget to vote please! It really helps <33

The days had started to cool down. It had been well over four moons since she last saw dandelion. She missed him dearly, but had begun to realise the chances of ever seeing him again were slim. He might have been dead moons ago. She had started to make her way downwards, away from the sun into a valley. There were precarious rocks and cliff sides she had to walk along, and enormous leaps that had to be leapt. She kept going though, her mind thoroughly focused on her surroundings, knowing her journey must come to an end soon. whatever that end may be.

Willow looked down from a hill and saw an enormous.... water. She had never seen anything like it, a round stretch of water, with a large island in the middle, with a miniature forest, with bushes, and a growing oak sapling at the centre, with a tiny clearing in front of it. Above it was a river coming from the lake, and a vast moor, next to the moor was a forest, of luscious oak and maple trees, next to this was marshlands, with pine trees and thorns overcrowding, which was boarded by the river. She peered down, but it was too far away to make out any detail. She could see a strange shape, like a box. She pricked her ears at the large object, seemingly to have a hole in the front. She made her way down the hill, spending at least half an hour picking her way carefully through the forest, finding an old twoleg nest, she guessed. Her father had once told her there were strange, tall naked creatures with gripping paws. And they lived in tall dens, with hard walls.

She continued past it, and after a while, the smaller twoleg den was nearer to her. As she came closer she caught scent of a stale smell coming from inside. Inside she could see stacks of dried grass, and smelt the same smell she had in the lower part of the mountains. She began to back away, and she heard a screeching bark. Spinning around, her eyes barely had time to focus on the strange creature

before a flurry of rusty orange fur came at her like a sharp gust of wind, knocking her down with a painful thump as her rotting branches were used as an accidental cushion, creating an echoing snapping sound which drifted through the forest. Yowling in surprise and pain, she struck out blindly, claws unsheathed. The weight lifted off her as she heard a yelp, and heard blood spatter on the ground. She scrambled to her paws and for the first time got a good look at it. It was a large, rank-smelling cat-dog-looking creature, with light grey underfur, black paws and ears, with a sunset orange pelt. It stared at her with cold amber eyes and bared its teeth, its cheek oozing blood. It lowered its head and advanced on her quicker than she had expected. She turned to run, and it leapt for her, catching her tail in its jaws. Screeching in agony, she flipped around, leaping onto its back. Her eyes widened and her ears flattened in terrified anger. A new instinct kicked in, and not really knowing what she was doing, she gripped onto its shoulders as she kicked her back legs into its spine, ripping its pelt apart as it turned around, snapping sharp canines at her. Suddenly, the ground came looming towards her, and she was crushed under the bony figure of the animal. Struggling to get her breath, winded, she wriggled out from under it and ran back into the forest. Skipping a step on her injured paw every few paces, she wobbled slightly. The animal gave chase, and it was advancing on her. Panting, she raced for the forest. Speeding up, she took the smallest paths through the undergrowth and most difficult trails. Tripping up more than once, but still going, and luckily, the fox was falling behind with long clumsy legs. She was nearing the lake, and her legs were aching terribly. She kept running, her feet pounding on the ground, her lungs burning. Approaching the beach, she lost her footing and tumbled to the ground, scuffing her ribs on the pebbly shore. Scrambling to her paws as fast as she could, she spun around madly, hissing and ready to fight for her life. But she saw nothing, only a rustic tail sliding into the forest. It had given up the chase.

She relaxed and turned around to a vast lake, with an island not so far from the rocky shore. She crouched down by the water, gulping it down until she felt sick. She sat back, licking her jaws. A quiet but noticeable wail caught her attention, and she peered around. A faraway rustle made her turn to the island, and she saw a tiny kitten on the edge of the water, soaked through, and exhausted

looking. Alarm sparked through her veins, and she immediately leapt into the icy water. She gasped as the cold seeped through her skin and froze her bones stiff, but kept kicking the water, and made steady progress towards the kit.

What are they doing here all alone? She felt smooth pebbles scrape across her numbing paws and coughed as she pulled herself onto the shore. She inspected the kit, sniffing its pelt as it backed away. It fluffed up, and hissed at her. It looked ridiculous with fluffy wet fur, hissing as if it wasn't the same size as her head.

"Hey, it's alright. I won't hurt you." It wrinkled it's nose at her and took a huge sniff of her scent, before sneezing loudly. Sympathy washed through her pelt, and she padded closer to it. It eyed her warily, but didn't move away.

"How did you get here?" She asked it gently, and it responded with a squeaky voice.

"My mother brought me here, then left. She said she'd be back but she hasn't come back yet. I tried to swim to find her but I couldn't swim. I'm cold." It whimpered and looked up at her with wide, sad eyes.

"How old are you?" Willow asked, eyeing the kit's poor figure.

"Nine moons." It said defensively, fluffing up again.

"Stop fluffing up." She scolded. "You need your fur to stay on your body to stop you from freezing to death." The kit grumbled and flattened its pelt. It shivered, its eyes miserable and disappointed.

"What's your name?" She asked him kindly, moving closer to him, letting him lay by her wet, but warm stomach.

"Name? My mother always used to call me Kit." He frowned, looking at his paws. She looked in surprise and sorrow at the mistreated kit.

"Are you going to take care of me now?" The little tomcat looked up into her eyes with bright hope. She winced, knowing she didn't really have time to look after a kit. She had to find Dandelion. And

what would happen when the kit was grown? These are things she couldn't think about when a small, soaking kit was snuggling into her belly. Her stomach crawled, but she knew the kit would die if she left him.

"Yes. Yes, I'll look after you now."

[image]

[image]

[image]

✧ Chapter 11 ✧

[image]

Don't forget to vote! It really helps <33

She had turned around after staying by the lake, and headed back to the mountains, as she had caught no scent of Dandelion. Now padding carefully over rocks and cliffy trails, she kept an eye on the kit, whom she had named Sunny. He was very pleased with his name and was singing his name to himself while he scrambled up rocks. She had decided not to give him a tribe name, as he wasn't a tribe cat. And neither was she.

Dandelion like the sun. She thought to herself as she looked at the kit crawling up large rocks. She had named him after Dandelion, for both their ambition and kindness. She continued walking, limping slightly. She heard a scrape of claws and fur on rock. She spun around in time to see a distressed Sunny disappear from view. Leaping into action, she bounded over the large rock, leaning over it to find him getting to his paws just under it. She exhaled loudly, and Sunny looked up at her in confusion.

"Are you okay?" He asked kindly, looking up at her with bright turquoise eyes.

"Yes, are you?" She asked back, and he smiled up at her.

"Of course!" He began to try to scramble up the rock again, and Willow leaned down, grabbing his scruff gently and hauling him up. As soon as he found his footing, he wriggled out of her grip, and bounded away, tail high. She had grown fond of the abandoned kit and watched him now pounce around, continuously checking he wasn't straying too far from her, as if thinking she might leave him. She smiled at him reassuringly, and he smiled gleefully back and bounded into some bushes. She followed slowly.

She heard a rustle in the bush and pricked her ears, thinking he might be trying to scare her. But then heard his voice further away

than the bush, humming his name to himself. Her audits perked up in alarm and scented the air. She could smell something but couldn't tell what. But it wasn't Sunny. She leapt into the bush, paws pounding on the earth, calling his name.

"Sunny? Sunny?!" She panicked, and when a dark, mud-coated face peered out a bush at her, she hissed anxiously, springing away in surprise. She watched the cat half emerge and snarled at it. The cat widened its eyes and seemed to see her for the first time.

"Wait I-" the cat burst into a hacking cough and tried to step closer, his paw outstretched. She slashed its face, slicing under its eye, and ran, calling Sunny again. He appeared out of a bush with a scared expression as she was heading for him, and she slewed to a halt, grabbed his scruff in her jaws, and sprinted away, the growing kit bouncing off her chest. Her heart pounded with a strange fear, a surge of protectiveness wrapped around her heart as she ran. Just as she was running out of energy, her paw slipped and she skidded to an ungraceful halt. Looking around, she hadn't realised where she had run to. She dropped Sunny distractedly, and padded forward, while he grumbled at the way he was "Treated like a kit."

She approached a caved-in hollow, paw marks printed on the untouched earth. Untouched for five moons. She saw dried, black stains in the sandy dirt. She used her plumy tail to shield Sunny from the sight.

That's more blood than I remember. She looked around to where she and Dandelion had last seen each other. *And probably the last.* She added to herself, turning around, seeing where she was chased into the forest. Anguish flashed through her as she remembered Dandelion dragging himself, while she ran for their lives. She backed away. Sunny pressed against her side, looking up at her with pale blue eyes.

"I'm alright. Just not feeling great."

"Okay, we should rest. It's getting dark." He padded over to the caved-in tunnel.

"This'll do." Before Willow could protest, he pushed aside a large

lump of sandy dirt, with small roots sticking out at all angles. Her fur prickled uncomfortably, but Sunny padded inside and made himself at home, sniffing around. He curled himself into one of two dips and reached his head up to see her over the rise.

"Coming?" His ears disappeared again, followed by a loud yawn. She gulped and padded to the entrance. She hesitated outside, sniffing for any trace of Dandelion. Nothing. She sighed and peered inside. She saw Sunny curled up in the dip Dandelion had been in, and an image of him flashed across her mind. Cold claws traced her heart, eyes wide as she stared around the dead-end tunnel, remembering the ominous moments of before. She stared hoarsely at the dip next to Sunny and relived the moment where they both woke up and stepped outside, determining their fate. She continued inside, ducking her head.

It feels smaller than I remember. She thought as she settled next to Sunny. He snored softly, his back falling and rising slowly, and deep, tired sighs came from him. She closed her eyes, ignoring the howls of herself screaming at Dandelion to run.

[image]

✧ Chapter 12 ✧

[image]

Don't forget to vote please! It really helps <33

Willow woke up slowly, yawning as she stared out of the tunnel's entrance. They had stayed in the tunnel for nearly a moon, and had been using spare time to teach Sunny how to hunt. he was a natural, and only the other week he caught his first rabbit. they had formed an unbreakable bond in the one and a half moons they had known eachother, and were now true family.

She shivered as the stretched out, her paws brushing the cold and empty space beside her. She sat up, and began grooming her pelt. Her mouth was dry, but she knew there was a stream nearby, and didn't mind her fur sticking to her tongue while she vainly tried to brush out the mud. She hadn't washed her pelt in moons, as she hadn't known when the next time she would come into contact with moisture would be. Willow sat up, waiting for Sunny to come back from his early hunt. After teaching him how to, he had started to go off and practice in the early dawn, usually bringing back a mouse or bird. She waited for a while, watching the rising sun cast warm rays across the floor of the tunnel.

She opened her eyes. She must have dozed off, and she sat up, looking around, expecting prey of some sort. But there was nothing. She peeked over the brim of the tunnel, and worry started to worm around in her stomach. Her heart lurched as she stepped outiside, and saw the sun. *Past sun high. Where is he?* She started urgently trotting, muzzle lowered.

She brushed past her rock, which had a thin, growing layer of moss. *I need to scratch that off later.* She thought distractedly, as she scented the air for his scent. *Yes!* She caught his scent. Faint, but guiding. She followed his trail, and approached the stream, ignoring the strange creature on the rock leap and plop into the cold water, it's naked body wriggling. She stopped dead and pricked her ears.

Voices? She stretched her head forward, straining her ears. She turned a few degrees, and stalked forward, catching brief, mumbling parts of a slightly heated conversation.

"...I never meant.."

"...But, that doesn't explain..."

"...I didn't have..."

"...Liar."

"...I always loved..."

"...So why'd you leave..."

"...I didn't! You left..."

"...Don't you dare put..."

"...But, you know before... with Birch..."

"...So? That makes... now... okay?"

"..Well, kind of.. but..."

"...I can't believe you...."

She made out the softer, yet whiny voice of a middle-aged she-cat, and Sunny's confused, hurt voice. And yet underneath that voice, there was a tone of anger and resentment. She heard his voice growing louder, and almost panic-y, she rushed forward through the bushes, expecting to see the mystery she-cat advancing on him, but instead, to her surprise she found him, advancing on her. She was a fluffy bright almost white cream cat, with cream fades and freckles on her legs, face and tail with yellow eyes. Sunny was almost a spitting image of her, but a pale ginger cream instead. She was appalled by the similarities between them both, and slid forward, fur slightly fluffed up and ears flattened.

"Sunny? What's going on? Are you okay?" She stalked towards him, eyes not leaving the she-cat. she had a guarded look in her eyes as

she stared defiantly back at her. Willow pressed her nose under his chin.

"Sunny? What?... what in the name of the stars? Kit, who is this she-cat?" said the she-cat, and bared her teeth at Willow, but Willow advanced faster than she thought she could, suddenly appearing over the she-cat, who was crouched, eyes on the ground.

"And who are you?" She peered at the cat under her. When she didn't respond, Willow straightened up and said.

"I see. Let me introduce myself. I am Willow That Shines At Dawn. This is my territory, and this is my kit." she raised her lips at the she-cat, daring her to argue.

"Your kit?" she she-cat stuttered, lost for words. "THIS IS MY KIT!" Willow stepped back, enjoying watching her get so riled up.

"I BORNED HIM, I RAISED HIM, AND YOUR PROBABLY THE ONE WHO STOLE HIM AWAY FROM ME!" She was panting now, seeming to be in anguish, but she saw in her eyes, she had no true love for him. If Willow hadn't rescued him, he would have been raised a slave. Yet as she turned to look at him, his growing figure, handsome build and heart, she knew he would have left her on his own. He was brave. and yet as he watched them argue, there was a sadness in his gaze. There was a cat who had not borne him, and yet was more of a mother to him than the cat that did.

This angered her, and she slowly turned to the she-cat, her nose wrinkling in disgust.

"You, you are disgusting. You left your kit alone, to die, or just to see if he would survive on his own. Now on whatever sad journey you're on, you come across him again, you want him back now another cat has done the mothering for you. You are disgusting." She spat at the cat, her claws itching. She should give her something to remember her by.

The she-cat stood up, flattening her fur. She glared at Willow.

"My name is Cherry, and Kit is not yours. He is mine." She widened

her eyes and narrowed them at the same time, challenging Willow.

Willow unsheathed her claws. "His name is Sunny!" She screeched, and without hesitation, she leapt onto Cherry, snarling as she pinned her easily, ripping her spine apart with her back legs. She bit onto her ear, staining the white fur red, and Cherry let out a pained yowl but surged up with enormous power. Unready, and now unsteady, Willow toppled over as she was thrown off, landing with a thump on her side. Winded, she gasped a breath before she was smothered with fur, suffocating. Suddenly the weight disappeared, and she squinted up to see Sunny dragging Cherry off her, snarling and cursing at her. Willow got to her paws and bounded forward, headbutting Cherry clear away from Sunny. while she regained her footing, she spoke to Sunny urgently.

"This is between Cherry and me." before she could say more, or Sunny could answer, she heard a yowl and turned around in time to see Cherry flying through the air, and dodged, Cherry landing roughly, winded, she could tell, by her gasping for air. She ran forward with a caterwaul, pinning her down.

She bit into her scruff, and blood poured into her mouth. She started tearing apart her already bleeding spine again, and pressed on a back leg with her back paw, bending it the wrong way. Cherry wailed under her, and Willow began choking on her blood. She released her scruff, spitting out her blood, before parting her fur and setting her jaws on her spine behind her neck. Gripping hard, she shook her head, shaking her roughly. Cherry screeched and pleaded to Sunny to help her. Willow lifted her olive gaze to him and was relieved to find him staring at Cherry with cold, unforgiving eyes. This gave Willow confidence, and she relaxed her jaw for a moment, before biting down hard. Cherry went silent, and Willow paused in shock. She heard Cherry's terrified breathing. *She thinks I'm about to kill her*. She released her and leapt off in an instant in shock. *I could have killed her... would I have killed her?* Cherry scrambled to her paws, and unsheathed her claws, panting hard but still defiant.

"Leave it. We're done." She flicked her head at Sunny, telling him they were leaving. He nodded and started to walk away, looking back at Willow and waiting for her to catch up, before sniffing her

wounds, though she hadn't many. As they left Cherry alone in the clearing, they entwined tails.

Before they had been walking for more than a few seconds, she heard a scuffling of paws, and spun around in time to see Cherry take a flying leap towards Sunny, screeching.

"TRAITOR!"

Controlled by pure instinct, Willow flew across Cherry's path, paw outstretched with claws unsheathed. She felt the satisfying feeling of flesh slide through her claws, but had her eyes closed for fear of impact, and couldn't see where she had struck. As Cherry toppled over, while Willow landed on all fours, she bounded over, standing over Cherry, who was on her back, crimson staining her white chest. Willow realised in horror where she had struck.

I sliced her throat open.

She watched in horror as Cherry gurgled out some words.

"help... too...much..... the pain.... make...make it stop..." she was coughing and spluttering, and Willow stood a little away, staring at Sunny with desperation and sincerity.

"What should i do?..." She whispered hoarsely. her head was spinning, and her stomach felt like it was turning inside out and then trying to come up by her airway. She swayed on her paws as she looked back at Cherry, then back at Sunny.

"Do what she says." His gaze was unreadable, and she nodded slowly and turned to Cherry.

"uh.... what would you like me to do?..." She stood and stared uneasily at Cherry.

"...make it stop..."

"I can't... I'm so sorry..." For a moment, Cherry's amber eyes met hers, and she vainly tried to lift her head closer to Willow. She could see in her eyes was pain, fear, but courage.

"Then kill me."

Willow stared in shock at the she-cat, moaning and tossing in front of her. She couldn't kill a cat.

"I can't!" she whispered and stared desperately at her.

"you... did this... to me. now... make... it... right." Cherry sighed loudly and painfully, and a stream of blood trickled out the side of her mouth. Willow tried not to be sick, and she stared dazily at Dandelion, questioningly.

"You have to." He said. He didn't seem to mind that his adopted mother was about to end the life of his blood mother. But then, hadn't Willow already killed her when she first adopted him? or when she was chased to him by a fox? or when she found the lake? or when she was banished? or when she was born? or when her parents were born? It all led up to this, and more. It's fate, and she can't change it.

Willow turned to Cherry, who was looking up at her with brave eyes. Willow leant down to her neck, which was now slowly oozing blood, vibrating with each gurgling breath.

"I'm sorry..." Willow's eyes burned, and she raised her gaze to Sunny, who nodded at her. He wanted her gone. She nodded, and stood straight as if she was going to leave. Then, she surged forward, gripping her throat in her jaws and twisting it as hard and fast as she could. Cherry died easily, and unknowingly. It was for the best. She would hate to feel the exact moment her pupils expanded and her heart stopped. She killed her in the kindest way possible. But as Willow swayed, and backed away unsteadily, tasting her blood, she felt nothing but shame, and guilt. Sunny bounded forward, a sympathetic look in his eyes, but Willow waved him away with her tail. She walked along the streambed, needing some time to think. She heard Sunny's pawsteps fade away into the cicadas, and clouds gathered above the trees on the horizon.

[image]

✧ Chapter 13 ✧

[image]

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They had buried Cherry's body, left a few pebbles and flowers on her mound, and left. Willow said she didn't want to stay there anymore, because there were too many memories, most of them were unsettling, and try going a different direction. Sunny agreed, and they set off two days later. As winter was coming along faster than they could blink, they had to get off the mountains if they were to survive. they headed the opposite way to the lake, where she first found Sunny. As the days began to get colder, they knew they had to get off the high mountains, as they weren't accustomed to being out in the snow. Willow was born in mid-autumn, and spent the whole winter in the cave. then, in early spring, she left the tribe.

Travelling down the perilous cliffs, and treacherous paths was dangerous and unnerving. There were close calls, pummeling rainstorms, and more. After travelling for half a moon, they were nearly halfway down when they came across a small, freezing lake, with thin sheets of ice encrusting the lakebed. Willow had caught a hare yesterday, a fantastic catch. This morning Sunny had caught a starling, and she caught a vole. they were making good progress, now her ankle had finally fully healed, and the injuries from Cherry were small and insignificant. They approached the riverbed, paper-thin ice cracking under their paws. She sniffed the water's surface, her hot breath billowing around, smoothing over the ripples her exhalations made. She lapped from the icy water, feeling it sink into her empty stomach like a rock, burning her gums and inner chest. She moved away for Sunny to have a drink too, licking her upper chops. She stood guard while he drank, complaining about the cold. She took in her surroundings. It was a big clearing, made of rocks, moss and a small amount of grass, which was covered in a thick layer of frost. the clearing was surrounded by huge, sharp, jutting

boulders, and a few pine trees beyond them to the sides and downward, whereas behind her, where they had just come down from, a steep, rocky slope emerging from a pine forest, where she had seen another one of those strange, long-legged, thin creatures. It was alive, and eating frosty grass, though there was little of it. She had stayed clear of it, despite her curiousness. Sunny said it was called a "deer" and they travel in big groups, or alone. She turned to where she had come from, and her gaze followed a trail of two sets of prints, sometimes crossing or becoming deeper, where they had trotted or ran to keep warm. She turned to see Sunny sitting by the water, watching her. She smiled at him, and he perked up, standing. we both stretched out our aching, stiff muscles before continuing down the path, away from the lake.

As they walked down the rocky path, slowly, stones trickled downward in their wake, as they padded on in cold silence.

"Before I found you..." Willow started, and Sunny lifted his head to look at her, but keep one eye on the path.

"I was chased to you, actually, by this... creature."

Sunny perked up as if she were telling him an old forgotten story from seasons and seasons ago.

"What did it look like?" he asked, eyes wide.

"Well, it looked like an angry, dog-sized cat. with fur the colour of the sun, and paws as dark as the night, with a snow-coloured underbelly."

"Oh..." Sunny looked mildly disappointed. he had been hoping she was kidding, and was about to describe a legendary creature, like a lion, or a tiger.

"That's just a fox."

"A fox..." Willow repeated it to herself a couple of times, growing used to the new word. "Well, he was angry for whatever reason, and chased me to the lake, where I found you." She smiled warmly at him, and when he smiled back, she said, "And I am so glad I nearly

died to find you." She pressed into his shoulder, and he pressed into hers. She took a step back to look at him. at eight moons old now, he would have made a fine to/be, probably a prey hunter. That decision would have been made by Stoneteller. She thought back to when she had been given her place in the tribe, as a hunter. for him slim shape of course, and naturally good ability to blend in with her surroundings. *well, I think I've become quite a good cave guard too. I fought against a fox, another cat, Sharptooth and came out alive. I would've suited either.* She smiled to herself as they continued.

They walked for another few hours, and their paws were aching terribly. Sunny had slipped on a loose rock, scratching the back of his ankle, which had oozed a few drops of blood before scabbing over, and all of their paw pads were bruised and scratched.

"Do you need to stop?" Willow asked him again. he had been wincing with each step, quietly braving through the pain. she expected him to say no and was faintly surprised by his answer.

"Yes please." he nodded over to a pine forest treeline, where there was a small tree stump. "That'll do. We can hide from the wind behind it." he changed direction, heading over to the stump, and she followed close behind. just as they neared it, she heard a yowl that made her blood run cold. her head beating faster and faster, she shoved Dandelion into the trees, shutting him up when he asked what in the stars was she thinking, and pushed him up into a tree. she followed him up, after glancing around.

"What is it?" he whispered quietly, and she didn't reply, raising her tail, telling him not to move. Suddenly Sharptooth bounded underneath the tree out of nowhere, and Willow froze, trembling. Sunny froze too, not because he was scared of Sharptooth. Se had never encountered a mountain lion before, but saw Willow was terrified, and knew he should be too. Sharptooth was sniffing the base of the tree, and Willow couldn't contain a quiet hiss. This creature had caused her to lose Dandelion. She narrowed her eyes. *If it weren't for you, I would still be with Dandelion.* She held back a growl, and Sunny laid his tail along her back, unsure why her hackles were raising. They were safe, right? Willow watched Sharptooth through narrowed eyes as it circled the tree, clearly on their scent. Sharptooth let out a puff, its breath floating around it

for a moment, like smoke, before drifting away. Lifting its thick, muzzle, Willow noticed the tufts of dark brown fur caught in its talons. Willow gulped. She thought to herself and bowed her head as Sharptooth continued sniffing, looking up at them. Willow sighed in relief, that they had chosen a tall, thin-branched tree. These tiny branches couldn't hold Sharptooth's weight, and Sharptooth knew it. While Sharptooth tried scouting for a way to get to them, she nodded to the other side of the tree. Sunny understood, and crawled around it, so the trunk was between them and Sharptooth. They climbed another set of branches, Sunny biting back an "ouch". When Sharptooth returned, she peered at it through the needles. It looked up at the tree, first in confusion, then frustration. It bounded off, sniffing the ground urgently. As it wandered off, Willow jumped down a couple of branches as fast as she could, before leaping down to the floor, her fall cushioned by needles. Sunny came after her, but slipped on the last branch, landing with a loud, painful thump. Sunny moaned, and Willow rushed forward. Sunny scrambled to his paws, and Willow was confused by the look of terror in his eyes as he stumbled to his paws, and Willow turned, slowly, around. Sharptooth's tail was disappearing into a mass of leaves. It knew they were there. Sunny let out a tiny cry. Willow backed away, her ears flattened, claws unsheathed.

"Sunny. when Sharptooth jumps out, I want you to run. I want you to run as fast as you can. I'll be right behind you, I promise." She turned her head to him slightly and saw him nodding.

"Okay, Willow."

"Slowly back away..." She murmured quietly, but before they could, Sharptooth flew out of a bush, in the opposite place she thought it would be.

"RUN SUNNY! RUN!" She gave him a hard shove, almost knocking him over. She couldn't have him freeze in terror. Happy to hear him turn tail and flee, she took on Sharptooth alone. Standing still, she stared into its eyes as it raced towards her. As it came close enough to swipe at her, she screeched at it, and leapt for it, fear lending her courage. Confused and scared, Sharptooth leapt away, running past her. W*ow, I can't believe that worked.* She realised what had happened. *Sharptooth is used to being top of the food chain. it isn't used*

to anything fighting back. She heard Sunny scrambling away in the distance, and she knew Sharptooth could too. She needed to keep its attention on her. She gave a low yowl, and Sharptooth looked back at her with fiery eyes. It half-crouched and stalked forward fastly. She snarled at it, and although it was more than five times her size, she had a new way that she might just be able to defeat it. It growled at her, flicking its tail. *You will not catch me or Sunny.* she heard Dandelion's voice in her head. *I am with you.*

She gave a caterwaul and leapt for the huge cat, and it widened its eyes, taking a step back, unsure of how to react to being attacked. Willow leapt onto its back and started shredding its spine, like she had done with the fox, and cherry. It screeched, as she tore at the flesh, her claws scraping bone. Sharptooth soon jumped out of shock and began running and spinning around like a bull, snarling and trying to reach her, but couldn't. She was whipped by its long tail, before she felt the same tipping feeling as she had on the fox. Sharptooth was about to roll, in an attempt to squash her. She grinned, and ran across its side, landing on its belly as it landed. She immediately bit into its white chest, pulling hard, feeling its skin ripping and blood pouring out of the hole she just made in its chest. it reached over, grabbing her tail, and ripping her off its belly, where there were smaller holes where she had dug in her claws. it threw her across the clearing, where she landed with a thump. she scrambled to her paws while Sharptooth did the same. It inspected its injuries as a flab of skin hung off its chest. As she got her battle stance ready, she heard a whoop. Both she and Sharptooth looked around, she saw Sunny on the edge of a cliff, looking at her with happiness, then horror. He had been watching the fight and was happy she was doing so well, but now he had caught Sharptooth's attention. Sharptooth looked back at her with narrowed eyes, and she stared back in horror as it turned away from her, racing towards Sunny.

"NO!" she cried out, and chased after it. her paws were thrumming on the ground as she caught up. *Is it going slower on purpose?* She ignored her question as she leapt for its back leg, catching onto its ankle. She wrapped her body around it, holding on tightly as she brought Sharptooth to a halt, and it turned around, grabbing her in its jaws, biting down hard on her shoulder blades, and threw her

away, running for Sunny again.

"WILLOW!" She heard him cry out, and scrambled to her paws, limping heavily, and ran after Sharptooth.

"NO! PLEASE!" she wailed as she realised she couldn't catch up. Sharptooth looked at her while it ran, and had an expression she couldn't quite read, but it visibly slowed down. It felt wrong but knew it was going to kill Sunny, and sped up, taking her chance. She leapt on its hindquarters, her weight bringing it tumbling down. She managed to climb onto its back as it fell, leap off it, and race towards Sunny, Sharptooth close behind. Last second, she slewed to a fast halt, spinning around and facing Sharptooth. Sharptooth skidded to a halt three tail lengths in front of her. She glared at it. Suddenly, she felt a jolt in her chest, and crouched, but the pain disappeared in a heartbeat. She stood up again, to see snow stuck midair. She turned around to look at Sunny, and found him dead still, looking at her. Her skin crawled, and she turned back to look at Sharptooth. They stood, panting, staring into each other's eyes. She looked into it's flaming eyes, only noticing that they were now.. green. She ignored the idea that it's eyes had changed colour. of course, they didn't. But when she looked at it's chest, there were no injuries. Her heart beating like a river, she watched nervously as it walked towards her, slowly. its eyes were locked onto hers, and it stood just a whisker-length from her face. she lifted her lips, ready to fight to the death, if it meant saving Sunny, but the Sharptooth had no anger in its eyes. She stood tense as it slowly leant its head forward, and stilled, its nose a claw's length from her shoulder. She didn't move, but her eyes were still locked on it's eyes. Suddenly, she felt a jarring pain over all her injuries, and she flinched back, hissing at the cat. She looked over her body and found no injuries, like the Sharptooth. She felt light, and new. She looked back at Sharptooth in wonder and confusion but saw just bobbing hindquarters as it walked away. It stopped and turned to look at her. It seemed to nod, but she couldn't be sure, and it walked away.

"Wow."

she turned around to see Sunny, watching Sharptooth walk away. Had he seen all of that? She was unsure, and waited for him to say

more.

"That was so cool! You fought off a mountain lion! It just walked away, because it knew it couldn't beat you!" He seemed ecstatic, and she decided he hadn't seen anything. In fact, she wasn't sure if, in his memory, she got any injuries.

"Thanks. Are you okay?" she sniffed his pelt. She felt weird.

"Am I okay? I'm amazing! you saved my life!" He rammed into her a little roughly, pressing his forehead into her clean chest. She smiled.

"I guess I did."

[image]

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✧ Chapter 14 ✧

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PICTURES ARE COMING SOON, MY AI SYSTEM IS DOWN CURRENTLY.

After the...thing... with Sharptooth, they had set off immediately, wanting to go away from that place. They were now in eagle territory. Below them came deer territory, then the lowlands. They stayed under the safety of trees, as a large eagle could easily take a cat into the skies. She had thought about the incident with Sharptooth a lot. It was strange. She knew it was probably better to not think about it, as it confused her. Last night she had an idea. What if she was looking in the wrong place for Dandelion? What if she had been so close to him that she could have been with him within a moon of separation?

What if Dandelion went back to the tribe to wait for her?

So she had half turned around and headed for the tribe. Now leaving the eagle hotspot and finding constant rabbit droppings and tracks, along with empty mouse burrows. She knew where she was. her father had stood with her on top of the cliff and pointed out the clearing where she encountered Sharptooth for the third time, after her mother and sister had died.

The sky was darkening, and they huddled under a moss-overgrown treestump, where they curled together in the overhang as it began to snow. just lightly, dappling their coats and flecking their spines.

They hadn't slept much, not just because of the cold, but anxiety. She was banished, and told to never return. Why would they accept her now?

It was getting colder as they went back up the mountain, their fur

coated in snow and whiskers dripping with ice. after walking for a few days, they passed under a huge overhang above them, treading carefully on a narrow ledge, a drop beneath them, 40 tail lengths down. Sunny padded in front of her, although he was growing fast, he was still smaller than her and found it slightly easier to walk along the narrow ledge. Suddenly, Sunny's front paw caught on a loose pebble, and his leg slipped down off the ledge, his shoulder and top half of his body coming after him like a shadow. He wailed, scrambling with his one remaining front paw on the brittle rockface, but couldn't get any traction as the wall simply crumbled beneath his claws. Willow leapt forward in an instant, grabbing the back of his spine. But he was heavier than she had expected and would've gone down with him if not for a sharp stone jutting out from the ground which she had stepped over only a moment ago. Her back paw behind it, she held onto Sunny, praying it wouldn't break. She pulled Sunny and herself up with a scrambling struggle. They crouched for a moment, panting.

"Are you okay?" Willow lifted her head to peer at the tips of his ears. She heard his shaky breathing, followed by his ears dipping and raising. he was probably just in shock. She waited a few minutes for him to calm down. When he was ready, they stood up and started going again. Almost immediately, his paw slipped again, but he regained his balance quickly.

"All ok?" there was no response, and she peered closer at him.

"Sunny?"

"I cant do it." she heard a hoarse whisper. Her heart started beating rapidly, in sympathy and terror for what came next. If he couldn't move, neither could she. They would be stuck there. She exhaled slowly, and his head shakily turned around to look at her sideways.

"I'm sorry, I-"

"Don't be. it's fine." She breathed out slowly. She knew what she had to do.

"Sunny, I want you to make yourself as small as you can. and flat. but not so flat you can't balance. just- yeah." She waited as Sunny

hesitantly crouched down.

"Done. What are you going to do?" Willow ignored him and took a step back, her head lifted up to focus on the narrow trail in front of Sunny.

"Willow?"

"I'm still here." She got her pouncing position ready, her heart pummeling her chest. If she fell, it would be certain death. and Sunny wouldn't be able to move for sure. and she was so close to the tribe. Just another hour and she could be reunited with Dandelion.

"Yeah, but what are you-" he let out a yelp and shrank down further, tensing and wrapping his tail around his body rapidly as Willow narrowed her eyes and took a flying leap in front of him. She landed roughly, her left paw, closest to the wall slipped underneath her, but her paw next to the edge landed perfectly, and she pushed up with her right paw, lifting up her left paw before she lost her balance. She crouched, panting hard and staring at the drop, a claw-length from her paws. She looked up to the rooty overhang, which had sprinkled her pelt with dirt.

"Willow?" Sunny sounded shocked she had done such a reckless thing, and shocked at the fact she was still on the ledge, and not sprawled out lifelessly at the bottom of the rocky pit. She exhaled slowly, and stood up, her legs trembling violently.

"Hold onto my tail, and stand up." She wafted her tail behind her, not quite sure where his face was, and too shaky to turn around. She felt teeth set into her tail and listened to him slowly stand up.

"Now, we're going to walk forward. Slowly. I won't let you fall, I promise. understand?" She felt him nodding through her tail and took a step forward. they were lucky because she had a long, plumy tail. because of its length, they wouldn't have to be perfectly timed to walk. They padded forward, approaching the place where they could detach. They came to a more narrow part of the ledge, and slowed down, more like crawling. Out of desperation to be away from the drop, Sunny released her tail and leapt across the gap, and

half onto the flat ground. But his muscles had become loose and weak from the tension and he struggled to scramble up, his back legs kicking at the side of the wall. Willow darted forward, reaching down to grab his scruff in her jaws. She pulled him up and collapsed next to him when he was up.

"PFFF." He said as she sighed. Sunny turned on his side to face her, and she did the same.

"Thank you. For what you did back there. You saved me, yet again." he smiled.

"No problem." she sighed, and they fell silent. Willow pricked her ear suddenly, her pupils dilating.

"What is it?" Sunny scrambled to his paws, his fur rippling as he stood. Willow stood as a statue, her fur prickling. She stared straight ahead, ears angled around a corner. Sunny listened and heard the gentle sound of snow landing, and a distant roaring and rushing sound. His fur prickled, he had never heard anything like it and stepped back. Willow turned back to look at him, her eyes full of sadness and anticipation and wonder and joy.

"Home."

PICTURES ARE COMING SOON, MY AI SYSTEM IS DOWN CURRENTLY.

✧ Chapter 15 ✧

[image]

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Willow was on edge. Sunny could tell because her fur was on end, and she was constantly stopping to scent the air, and flinching at every sound. He watched her cautiously. She wouldn't tell him what "Home" meant, as she had sprinted off after saying it, seemingly not in control of her body.

"Wait!" She paused, scenting the air once again, before choose the left path out of two, and padding slowly around a corner, before Sunny saw a sight that took his breath away.

A huge mass of water was cascading down into a foaming river from a high rock wall, a faint rainbow with low opacity covered the white water. Sunny stared at it with wide eyes, in awe of it's natural beauty.

"Come on." the sound of Willow's voice roused him, and he turned to look at her. She was walking towards the roaring tower of white, and he followed hesitantly. He stared at the mass of whirling water below them, keeping Willow's tail in the corner of his eye. Suddenly, the tip of her tail vanished. He yelped in surprise, stepping back. It was just him, the rock face, and the water.

"Willow?" He called anxiously. "Where-" He stopped mid-sentence as a pair of eyes stared at him through the mist of the waterfall. Wondering if he was imagining things, he stared cautiously back as suddenly, his own reflected blue eyes flashed a deep, golden amber. He blinked in surprise, and when his eyes opened again, the pale sunshine eyes were staring at him straight on. He found himself unable to look away, being controlled and comforted at the same time as the eyes stared harder. It was Willow that roused him, calling his name from behind the mass of water. The eyes disappeared in a flash, and he peered through the water, and made out her pointing at the edge of the waterfall with her tail. he made

his way around it, before diving through the water where it was thinnest.

He looked up and around to see dazzling lights, dancing around on the face of the rock, smoothed by the water. He was misted by the spray, which sent chills down his spine but his eyes were captured by the enchanting patterns on the light. He let out a breath of wonder, turning around, his pupils dilated and eyes wide.

"Come on." He turned to see Willow, light dancing sadly in her eyes.

"It's time."

[image]

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✧ Chapter 16 ✧

[image]

Don't forget to vote please! It really helps <33

Willow and Sunny had paused outside a gaping hole, the waterfall next to them, continuing to the right of them. They were under it's great mass. Sunny looked cautiously at Willow, who was staring into the cave, unmoving. He could hear murmurs coming from inside the cave, and pawsteps. He could make out quiet complaints of the cold, and he let out a *mrrow* of laughter as he heard a cat claim his whiskers were falling off. He cast Willow a sideways glance, who was staring into the cave longingly. He looked at her in concern. Her body shuddered as she let out a shaky breath. Her tail and whiskers quivered in anticipation, and she raised a paw to move, but placed it back down again with a sigh.

"You okay?" Sunny asked her gently, his eyes round, gaze soft.

"Yeah, yeah. I just gotta get my stuff together." Willow didn't look at him, and her voice was shaky. He gave her a brief nod, and sat down, waiting for her to be ready. After a minute, Willow turned to him, her olive eyes flashing.

" I'm ready." Her eyes had a new, careful yet brave glow to them, and as Sunny looked at her, he widened his eyes as they flashed crimson, the pomegranate colour swirling around her eyes like smoke, but only for a heartbeat, then it faded away in a moment. He exhaled, and Willow tipped her head, angling her ears at him.

"All okay?" She queried, confusion was the only thing swimming in her gaze now, and he smiled reassuringly back at her.

"Yes, lead the way, Willow." A warm rush shot through his veins, and he dipped his head down, feeling odd. *I love Willow, i do but... what was that emotion?* He pondered as Willow took a hesitant step

forward, turning back to Sunny. He gave her an encouraging smile, and she nodded, smiling back and padded into the cave. He followed, and as his eyes adjusted to the darker environment, he peered around, looking at cats. Many cats, all shapes, colours, and sizes. He felt nervousness crawling in his stomach. He had never been around this many cats at once. To his right he could see where the ground lifted, and continued out in a thinner hollow, then a narrow tunnel which continued into a big cave, a quarter of the size of the main cave, but still big. It had shiny circles and shapes on the floor, stars reflected in them, even though it was day. He wanted to stop, and go look at the strange stone icicles jutting out from the floor and the ceiling, some meeting in the middle, and listen to the echoey drips, but Willow was walking forward into the centre of the cave, her tail flicking nervously, and her ears flat. No one had seemed to notice them until now, but as their stranger scent wafted around the room, and more cats began to realise there were oddities among them, they began to stalk forward, hissing threats. Caterwauls echoed throughout the cave, and angry screeches broke the calm from before. Willow looked panicked, and backed up into Sunny. He pressed against her, before a tail was raised by a ginger-brown she-cat with amber eyes. He felt Willow relax slightly. The brown she-cat padded forward, her head tilted to the side, muscles flexing.

"Willow That Shines At Dawn?" The she-cat said. Sunny looked in confusion at Willow as he saw joy in her gaze. *Was that her... full name?* He wondered.

"Leaf From Autumn Tree!" Willow pounced forward, on her tip-toes as they pressed their foreheads together. Sunny watched, utterly perplexed as cats around them murmured in confusion and disapproval, before yowls of joy echoed through the cave. Cats crowded forward, separating him from Willow, a small ring of space around Willow and Leaf, and a smaller ring around himself.

"You're here! You're- you're alive! Is Dandelion with you?" Leaf asked, lifting her head and looking around for the cat, her eyes meeting Sunny's for a moment, whom she looked at in disappointment.

"Where is he?" Leaf asked Willow hoarsely, her gaze searching

Willow's. Willow stared back in desperation, her eyes blinking swiftly. Her eyes were stinging, Sunny could tell from her expression as she stared at Leaf hopelessly.

"He isn't here...?" She croaked, a tear slipping down her face. Sunny launched himself over the crowd in alarm, pressing himself next to Willow, his eyes searching hers in concern. But her head was down, too low for eye contact, and as she slipped to the ground silently. Also alarmed, Leaf crouched in front of her, pursuing her gaze.

"Why would he be here?..."

It took Willow a moment to pull herself together enough to talk.

"Because we lost each other. In the first few days of leaving." Outraged and concerned yowls blasted out from the crowd.

Leaf ignored them, her chest shaking.

" But that means you've been alone for six moons. Willow, are you okay?" Willow stared at her pale paws, before lifting her head to look at Leaf, then Sunny.

"No. I was alone for a few moons. But then i met Sunny. He changed everything in the best way." Leaf looked to him appreciatively.

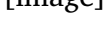
"Thank you, Sunny." Leaf looked back to Willow.

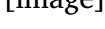
"Do you know if Dandelion is alive...?" She asked quietly, her voice sounding painful and full. Willow shook her head hopelessly.

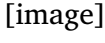
"My last guess was he might be here, waiting for me..."

"No... he isn't. He never came back, like he was told to." This was a new voice, the voice of a she-cat, with an authoritative tang to her meow. Sunny turned around to see a brilliant white she-cat with icy eyes. Sunny looked meekly at the she-cat as Willow stood, her gaze surprisingly cold as she glared at the white cat.

"Stoneteller."







✧ Chapter 17 ✧

[image]

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Willow was waiting by the entrance to the cave. She needed to see her father. Her heart pounded as she watched the scattered sunlight through the waterfall flicker. He had to be back from his hunt soon. A couple of kits had come to check her out, and told her that she didn't smell like the tribe, and she had to explain that she once lived there, and had seen their mothers expecting them.

"Really? So you had seen us before we were *born*?" One squeaked.

"Mhm." She nodded.

"Whoahhh" Another one gasped, standing on its rear legs and falling backwards onto his sister, whom squealed angrily and pushed him off. She couldn't hold back a *mrrow* of laughter as they squabbled.

She twisted her neck back to groom her fur, her paw pads getting chilly on the cold stone floor. She was surprised the river below hadn't fully iced over, but then, she remembered, it was a fast moving river, so it would take a long time if at all. She had just finished grooming her plumy tail, when a patter of pawsteps sounded from outside the cave. She pricked her ears, trying to make out Feather's voice, and licked her chops nervously. What if he *wasn't* happy to see her?

He has to be. im his daughter. She thought dismissively. *But I'm also exiled, and I shouldn't be here.* But Dandelions sister, Leaf, was happy to see me. She didn't have time to second guess her choice, because at that moment his dark, faintly striped face appeared from around the corner, shaking the water from his pelt. He looked happy. She felt a twinge of sadness, that he was doing so well without her. *But its also been a long time, and you should be happy for him!* She inwardly scolded herself, and puffed out her chest, trying to look

big and happy and proud. But the moment their eyes met, her chest deflated and he stopped dead, dropping the eagle he must have caught. His orange eyes fluttered, and he blinked as if he thought he were seeing things. He stepped over the eagle, and walked forward hesitantly, unbelieving, tail-tip twitching. He forgot about his eagle, and his face was expressionless. Willow stared at him miserably and happily all at once. She realised how much she had missed him. They stood, face to face as his gaze flitted from one eye to the other.

"Dad?" Willow mewed hopefully. A smile spread across his face, and his eyes watered.

"Willow-" He croaked, cut off as Willow leaped into him, tumbling him over, laughing and crying, suddenly forgetting everything. Dandelion was here, they had never been exiled. She pulled back to let him speak, but spoke again before he could.

"I've missed you so much..." She burst, and Feather looked at her lovingly.

"I missed you too, but, what are you doing here?"

"Well..." Willow began, looking at her paws. "I've been looking for Dandelion."

"Dandelion?" He asked, his expression perplexed. "Shouldn't he be with you?" He joked, then his laugh faded away at her grave expression.

"I haven't seen him in six moons, dad."

Her father's expression turned sorrowful, and turned his attention to the scars which adorned her pelt. He nodded at them.

"Sharptooth...?" She nodded without a word, and he pulled her close.

"Oh my brave, brave girl...." His throat sounded sticky, and she realised he was crying.

"My poor girl... i should've done more to make you stay..."

"There was no stopping me." She replied softly. "I would have never left Dandelion."

[image]

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✧ Chapter 18 ✧

Don't forget to vote please, it really helps <33

Sunny looked unsurely around, waiting for Willow to come back. She was waiting by the entrance for her father to return, and he looked around at the cats, who were looking at him with distrust. He had peered meekly at them, but then he had remembered how strongly Willow had addressed the tribe leader, Stoneteller. He was always learning from her. This made him realise that they had no right look at him like that, because he hadn't done anything wrong. He straightened up, and glared back fiercely, and they looked in surprise at him, before turning away, casting wary glances back. He huffed augustly, and wrapped his tail over his paws.

He whipped his head around, biting fiercely at the base of his tail. He furiously searched for the creature that was irritating him, and pricked his ears at the satisfying crack of a flea, and lay down, eyes narrowed as he dozed off. Within a few minutes, his eyes opened to the excited meows of Willow and a dark grey tomcat with white hairs edging his muzzle, and the sympathetic mews of cats around, watching with some smiling faces, and some with undisguised disapproval. He huffed, and turned back to nibble at the base of his tail once more. *These pesky fleas, must be from the tribe. Do they not wash*? He mumbled in his brain, and before he could bite at them once again, he looked irritably up as snowy paws approached him. Realising who it was, he looked at her briefly with an apologetic gaze, before dipping his head politely. He stared back uneasily as she gave him the same polite gesture.

"Fancy a walk?" Her gaze was questioning, tail amiably flicking behind her.

"Uh..." He glanced towards Willow, but she was sat talking with her father. He felt Stoneteller's gaze burning through him, and he turned back to her, and was once again pierced by the icy eyes. Her gaze briefly flitted to Willow, before turning back to him, with a

slight smirk in her royal eyes.

"Willow has her own things to worry about right now. And so do you." He looked at her uneasily. *What does she mean?* He nodded.

"Okay, Stoneteller." He hoped he had pronounced her name correctly.

"Good. Come on, then." She walked away, towards the entrance. He scrambled to his paws, dizzily swaying from getting up so fast, and tried to catch up. As they walked out, she twisted her head for a moment to make sure he was following while he desperately tried to catch Willow's eye. But she was so focused on her father, he ended up walking out in vain.

Stoneteller called his name, and he turned to realise she was far ahead of him. He trotted to catch up with her, appearing at her side, his tongue passing over his chops anxiously. Stoneteller cast him a glance, before turning right, down a sloping path towards a frozen river, and a small, bare tree with a little pile of rocks underneath. Stoneteller padded towards it, beckoning him to follow. She stood in front of it, her ears twitching at the grumble of water beneath the ice.

"Here lies Willow That Shines at Dawn's mother, and sister." She said, her voice containing less emotion than you would think it would.

"Oh... I...." Sunny had suspected this was Willow's original home, but never imagined her living here before he met her. She had never mentioned her home, or her family.

"How did they die?" He asked, looking at the small mound.

"They were sick." She replied, and paused while they both examined the pile. Straightening up, she said,

"Come on."

She shook her head softly, and turned away, walking back towards the cave. He pricked his ears, hoping he would be able to go back and see Willow. But instead of going into the cave, Stoneteller

turned left, heading towards the waterfall. He groaned inwardly, but turned to follow her. As they walked under the frozen water, Stoneteller paused, and he sighed impatiently. As he waited for Stoneteller to move on, he looked around at the huge sheets of translucent ice, cascading yet frozen in time around him. He could see and hear the water in the eyes rushing. It was like a straw, ice surrounded the outside of the waterfall, while water continued to flow inside it. As he looked deeper into the ice, peering into his own eyes, they suddenly burst into a bright amber, swirling and twisting in his gaze. They were the same eyes as he saw earlier that morning. Then the eyes dipped, an odd, thanking gesture. He narrowed his eyes at the eyes, but instead of narrowing too, they seemed to smile at him, and turn side to side, as if the invisible head was shaking. Just a heartbeat later, it was gone. He was stuck to the spot, his heart pounding.

"Ready?" Stoneteller's voice roused him, and he turned to look at her. She was already out from under the waterfall, gazing at him expectantly. He cleared his throat, embarrassed and trotted quickly towards her. She continued walking, and he slowed down, walking beside her.

"So, how many moons are you?"

"Um, nearly 12 moons." He replied quietly, and uncomfortably.

"You don't wish for a conversation?" She asked, emotionlessly.

"Uh, no its not that its just-"

"You don't know me, and don't trust me. Understandable. I did exile your... adopted mother? Well, she's not that much older than you. Whats your status with her?"

"Well.. yes, kind of. And, i don't know. She's more of a friend. A good friend. A best friend, but she cares for me like a mother would."

"Because you weren't given the mother you deserved." She stated, and Sunny looked up at her with an awed yet guarded expression.

They turned a corner around a leafless tree and boulder, heading back for the cave. But instead of turning back to the waterfall, she continued towards the stone wall of the left side of the mountain the cave was based in. It was a huge, looming wall of rock that no cat could climb directly. Instead, she approached a few dead bushes, all clumped together. Curious, he tilted his head as they neared the bushes, and Sunny noticed scratch-marks in the frozen dirt, pointing at the bushes. Stoneteller paused, turning back to look at him. She grinned at him softly, before ducking under the bushes, her scraggly white coat disappearing within a moment. He stared at the bush she had slipped under.

How? Its just rock behind! Unless...

He leaned forward, scenting the air. A gust of warm wind brushed his whiskers, and he caught a whiff of cats.

"Hm." He paced around the bushes for a minute, trying to figure out how to go through. He saw a tiny gap between two of the bushes, and he poked his nose inside. He pushed his head in, then his body. His nose bumped a cold, smooth and hard surface. Blind, he used his whiskers to feel around. *Theres nowhere to go!* He despaired, feeling around desperately. Just then, he found a hole. He immediately crawled in, though it was very narrow.

He pushed through, following the faint warm air, and a tiny prick of light. The tunnel began to get tighter, and he was getting hot. His was panting now, panicking as the dot of light vanished.

"Stoneteller?" He called out, pausing, his own breathing echoing off the close walls, taunting him. After no reply, he raised a paw, feeling his way forward. The tunnel was far too thin to turn around, so forward was the only way. He slowed down, closing his eyes and slowing his breathing down. He felt himself calming down, and the light appeared again, but bigger. He wormed his way forward, exhaling as a gush of cool air swept through his pelt, and the walls seemed to sweep away from him, and his chest swelled with cold, fresh air that tickled his lungs refreshingly. He padded up to Stoneteller, who gave him a pleased nod.

"Welcome to my cave." She murmured, her mew echoing softly

around the sheer and small walls of the cave, a shaft of light darting through the ceiling.

"Your cave?" Sunny asked as he looked around, squinting in the dim. She grunted in response.

"Wow... I mean, it's... beautiful...." He looked around, perplexed and awed by the dripping stone icicles, straining to reach the floor, and some sprouting from the ground, reaching upwards. Some reached each other, and held onto each other. A watery song flowed through the cave, produced by endless dripping, all different pitches. He felt relaxed by it, and nervous from the hollow tune at the same time. He realised he had strayed from Stoneteller, and started back to her. Stoneteller glanced at him, before padding away. He tilted his head and followed her, pausing as she approached a big, round puddle, a tail-length across. He watched its glimmering surface in a trance, watching a liquid mist swirl and smoke within it. It seemed to glow, emitting an eerie yet tranquil light. Stoneteller twisted back to look at him, an expressionless look on her face. Turning back to the puddle, she leaned over, pricking her ears. Her tail quivered, and her whole body trembled for a moment. Her tail straightened out behind her, and her mouth seemed to move, but no sound was made. In fact, he noticed, there was no echoing drips in the cave. Everything was silent. His heart drummed in his ears, and he wanted to leave. Stoneteller froze, staring into the puddle. He glanced at her sideways, concerned and confused. Stoneteller lashed her tail once, then her muscles relaxed. Her shoulders shifted, and she reached out a paw. She dipped her paw into the water, sending ripples across its surface. She pulled back, her paw dry.

The ripples continued, small waves tapping the edges of the puddle. His muscles started working themselves, and his legs took him to the puddle. Strangely, the ripples were continuously spawning at the spot her paw had touched the water. Entranced, he stepped over to the puddle's shore. He leant over, and the moment his eyes met with his own, the ripples immediately sank and faded away. He looked into the water, and at the sight of something deep within in, a gripping pain shot through him, and he cried out as his whole body tensed, searing pain sliced along his pelt, and he is struck with

terror. He groaned and he stood, shaking, wanting to look around for Stoneteller for help, but his eyes were stuck on his own fate as the future unravelled. Finally, a wave a grief trickled through his veins, his muscles relaxing but expression defeated. He ducked his head, flattening his ears as his heartbeat slowed.

A tear slipped down his cheek, landing on the puddle, and yet slid off the water's surface, like oil on water, and lay in a collected bubble to the side. Stoneteller leaned towards him, and murmured.

"Willow mustn't know. Her destiny awaits, and if she is told, all will be lost." She stepped away when he nodded, understanding and sorrow swimming in his eyes. Stoneteller had padded to another puddle. One with stars twinkling endlessly and a permanent swirling shape. She beckoned him forward, and angled her ears to the puddle. He plodded over slowly, tail dragging behind him. He approached her, and looked deeply into her eyes.

"Is it the truth? Is it the only way? There must be another way, surely! I don't want to-" He broke off suddenly as Stoneteller came forward and embraced him, head to shoulder. She pressed hard into his shoulder, and he felt held. He calmed, and Stoneteller took a step back.

"I know it is difficult seeing your own death. I have seen my own, and I look forward to it no more than you look forward to yours. Some wish to not know, some are desperate to know. But you needed to know. So in the moment, you can do the right thing." She meowed to him solemnly. Sunny looked at her with a new respect and trust. He opened his mouth, but Stoneteller quietened him, and nodded to the puddle at their feet.

"Drink."

He blinked and crouched down. He sniffed the waters surface, scenting stone, water, and something cold and fresh. He opened his mouth, and lapped at the rippling water. The sparkling liquid danced on his tongue, and he tasted the stars.

✧ Chapter 19 ✧

Don't forget to vote please, it really helps <33

She had caught up with almost every cat, but there was one she still hadn't talked with.

Branch.

Their last meeting wasn't exactly positive, and he hoped to clear things up with a good friend she didn't want to lose.

She looked around for him for a while, but hadn't caught sight of him yet. Instead, she looked around for his father, Bush where mice hide. His mother had died during kitting him, which is what had brought them together in the first place. They had both lots their mothers. She spotted bush, and padded over to him.

"Its good to see you again, Bush Where Mice Hide." He turned around with a surprised and pleased expression.

"It is good to see you, Willow That Shines At Dawn."

Willow stared into Bush where mice hide's eyes. He looked sadly back at her.

"He's gone?"

"Yes, Im so sorry."

Willow bowed her head.

"Im sorry for your loss too. How did he die?" Bush was tearing up, and tears were already trickling down Willow's face.

"Sharptooth, same night as you were seperated from Dandelion." He

mewed sadly.

"Oh Branch..." She closed her eyes and tried not to imagine Branch's dying screams, or Dandelion coming across his dead body, and getting caught by sharptooth. She tried to push away all her thoughts, so she could just focus on Branch. Her heart ached, and a dull burn throbbed in her head.

"Thank you for letting me know." She got ready to turn away, looking back at Bush.

"Of course. i wish you well, Willow. Branch from fallen tree will run with you." He nodded at her.

"Thank you. I wish you well." Willow turned and walked away, and saw Sunny padding out of stoneteller's tunnel. She tilted her head, her sadness washed away by a surge of confusion.

What was he doing in Stoneteller's cave?

꧁ ✧ Chapter 20 ✧ ꧂

Don't forget to vote please! It really helps <33

Sunny wandered out from Stoneteller's cave, and looked around aimlessly.

Now what? what do i even do?

Sunny sat down, his eyes unfocused, his tail twitching pointlessly beside him. He looked hollowly down at his paws. He noticed the tiny pale hairs, sprouting from just above his claws for the first time. He raised a paw, looking closely at his claws. He had never taken the time to look at his own body in this way. *I don't know how long I'll have left to look at things anymore.* He sighed, closing his eyes briefly. Willow would be back soon, he knew, and he knew he couldn't tell her. She would refuse to leave the cave and try to protect him. As much as he wanted to confide in her, and cry and scream and try to save himself, he knew that wasn't supposed to happen. It was his destiny. His stomach crawled as he imagined dying. He flattened his ears as he imaged Willow watching him die. A rock landed in his stomach. He wouldn't let her see the end of him. And he would save her. No matter what it takes.

"Sunny? What're you doing? In... Stonetellers cave?" She tilted her head as he looked up at her stuffy face. He ignored the question.

"Willow, what's wrong?" He asked, a concerned tone edging his voice. "Oh, I um... a friend... he died..." her eyes darted from him to the floor in a frenzied manner. Her tailpipe flickered, and her voice shook.

"Oh Willow." He pressed against her roughly, making her sit down. "Im so sorry." He closed his eyes, thanking the stars that now there was a reason for his eyes to sting. he drew back.

"What was his name?" He asked gently, his eyes squinting and sore.

He smiled softly at her.

"Branch." She sniffed.

"Branch from Fallen tree."

"You sound like a good friend." He tried to ignore the sting of sadness that she had never told him of her life before meeting him. He sighed and looked around, the dipping sun catching his eye. *One less day to spend with Willow.* He thought bitterly.

"It's getting dark. We should get some rest." He gently guided her over to the beds, and curled down around her, pushing his nose into her neck fur. He felt Willow shift.

"We'll leave tomorrow. I need to leave." Sunny flinched. He screamed inside. He wanted to say, *can't we stay a bit longer? Don't make me leave! Willow please, I don't want to die. I want to live! With you!* He shrank back. "Okay." He said stiffly, his throat tied and wavering.

"Night Sunny. Sleep well." Two sapphire orbs distracted him, and he shifted his gaze towards the eyes gazing at him from her cave. A faint misty pelt loomed behind the two sad, expressionless eyes. He nodded slightly. *I won't tell her. I won't change anything. I'll let myself die.* He turned away, pressed into Willow's back, calmed by the continuous rise and fall of her body. He didn't look back to Stoneteller's gaze, but felt it watch him for a minute, before his pelt cooled and he knew, for that moment, he was there with Willow. And that's all he wanted.

✧ Chapter 21 ✧

Don't forget to vote please, it really helps <33

Willow was falling away from him. Speeding away. Falling, down towards the earth. He was flying, and being pulled away from her. He called out to her, but his throat was being squeezed. He choked, clawing at thin, scabby yet intangible tendons. He cried out, a silent gasping scream as he was tugged away by invisible claws, ripping his body apart as Willow hit the ground. He squirmed, desperate to make sure she was okay. He was twisted, and could no longer look back on Willow. A cold gust of wind blew through his fur, and yet he felt warm and damp. he suddenly felt content yet terrified, and tired. His eyes drooped, and he felt his muscles relaxing. He tried to call for Willow one last time before the sun must have gone down, because he suddenly couldn't see anything, and he was ready to sleep.

Sunny opened his eyes, and saw a shaft of light penetrating the gloom. He sighed,

dropping his head back onto his paws.

It wasn't real. He thought to himself, pinning his ears and yawned. *And it won't be real until it is.* Willow's head lifted from his shoulder, her anatomy swaying drowsily. She yawned, stretching her paws out over his back, her toes and claws flexing before she purred, resting her head on her outstretched paws.

"Morning." He chuckled, pushing his paws down, and raised his figure, sitting up. Her limp body slumped off with an "oomph!"

Willow rolled over onto her back, purring, she snuggled into his side, her paws curled in the air. She closed her eyes halfway and *mrrowed* sleepily.

"That's the best sleep I've had in moons!" She exclaimed, rolling

over onto her belly, and looking up at him.

"Yeah, me too." He lied, avoiding her gaze. Instead, he looked around at the other cats waking up. they began to groom each other, purring and talking in sleepy but cheerful voices.

He turned his head to Willow, pricking his ears when he realised she was struggling to reach a matted spot on her rump. He spun around, and gently used his head to push hers away as she growled in frustration. He began grooming her, spitting out the small lumps of dirt. He purred, Willow turning her head to groom his ears. They were almost spotless when Stoneteller's voice called through the cave. They turned their heads towards the old she-cat, who sat outside her cave, listing her paw, licking it, then brushing behind her ears, and repeating the process a couple of times before she stretched, and padded back into the cave.

Willow brushed him off gently.

"We need to leave." She cooed.

"I know." He said stiffly.

"I need to say goodbye to some people... this will... probably be the last time i see them again..." She stammered, looking sombrely into his warm gaze.

"I know. I'll be alright." She dipped her head gratefully and rushed off, her long tail swishing behind her. He lowered his gaze. He wrapped his tail around his paws and sighed. He felt a shadow looming over him, and his skin prickled as he felt breath tickle his neck. Stoneteller stood behind him, ominously.

"I'm sorry." She said, her mew rumbling.

Sunny watched Willow dart from cat to cat, grievously saying goodbye to her closest friends.

"Me too."

✧ Chapter 22 ✧

Don't forget to vote please, it really helps <33

His belly was warm and full as he padded back down the cliff's face. He felt at peace. He knew what would happen. So he knew how much time he had to make Willow realise how much she means to him.

Willow had been evidently and undoubtedly somber since they left. He wasn't surprised. She had had to leave them twice now.

Sunny's heart raced as he and Willow ventured away from the treacherous mountains, their paws crunching against the rough terrain. The wind whipped through his fur, carrying the scent of pine and danger. They were walking on thin ice, descending towards the lowlands where hope and uncertainty awaited.

As the sun dipped below the rugged peaks, a chilly breeze swept through the valley, carrying the scent of damp earth.

"Stay near, Willow. He called out, his ears twitching at every rustle in the underbrush.

"We don't know what we'll find."

Willow nodded, her sleek fur ruffling in the wind. Her tail flicked nervously.

Sunny and Willow cautiously descended the snowy mountainside, their breath forming misty puffs in the frigid air. The silvery moon cast an ethereal glow over the landscape, illuminating the towering pines that loomed like sentinels in the night.

Sunny's thoughts were consumed by the ominous prophecy delivered by Stoneteller. The weight of his impending doom hung heavy in his heart, but he was resolved to keep it a secret from

Willow, to shield her from the fear that gnawed at him.

As they padded silently through the thick carpet of snow, the silence was suddenly shattered by the sharp crack of a branch. Willow's fur bristled as she crouched low, her keen eyes scanning the growing darkness.

"What was that?" she whispered, her voice tense with apprehension.

Sunny's ears pricked up, his heart racing.

"I'm not sure," he murmured, his voice laced with urgency as they pressed forward, their senses on high alert. She stammered, her voice trembling with fear.

Amid the eerie silence that followed, Sunny's mind raced, and he knew that their journey towards the unknown was fraught with peril. The prophecy weighed heavily on him, and the realization dawned that he might not be able to protect Willow from the fate that awaited him.

Sunny padded carefully through the thick snow, his paws sinking into the soft white blanket. The icy wind whistled through the tall pine trees, making them sway and creak ominously. He shivered and quickened his pace, his breath forming small clouds in the frigid air.

"Hey Sunny, slow down!" Willow called from behind.

"You're going too fast, you'll slip!"

Sunny glanced back at his friend, his sapphire eyes filled with worry.

"We have to keep moving, we don't know what's out here."

Willow caught up to him, her grey fur fluffed up against the cold.

Sunny hesitated, his heart heavy with the weight of his secret.

Willow narrowed her eyes, studying Sunny.

"Are you ok?"

Sunny nodded, unable to meet her gaze, and unable to hide his fear of the future from her.

"I can't shake the feeling that something terrible is waiting for me down there."

Willow's ears twitched with concern.

"You can do this."

Sunny managed a small, grateful smile before continuing their descent, the thick silence of the mountains looming around them.

"Its getting dark. We should rest here for the night." Sunny mewed, pausing.

"Right. Lets dig a hole?" She asked.

"Yes. Oh- just wait, make the entrance here instead. facing away from the wind." She nodded and turned around, digging the other way. They dug until they had an underground room, where they managed to break the thin layer of ice blocking them off from the ground.

They slept, but not soundly.

✧ Chapter 23 ✧

Don't forget to vote please, it really helps <33

Sunny and Willow padded down the winding mountain path, the wintry air nipping at their fur. The towering pines cast long shadows across the snowy ground, and the distant sound of an eagle's cry echoed in the crisp air.

Willow flicked her tail nervously, her olive green eyes scanning the unfamiliar terrain.

Sunny's deep blue eyes gleamed with determination as he forged ahead, weaving between frosted rocks and fallen branches.

A shiver ran down Sunny's spine, and the memory of Stoneteller's chilling prophecy echoed in his mind.

Sunny gazed out over the sprawling mountainside, the snow-capped peaks stretching toward the sky like frozen waves. His creamy fur almost disappeared against the white landscape, but his deep blue eyes shimmered with determination. Beside him, Willow's grey form blended seamlessly with the rocky terrain as she surveyed their surroundings.

"Willow, do you ever wonder if we'll find our way out of these mountains?" Sunny's voice was tinged with uncertainty.

Willow turned to him, her olive green eyes reflecting the uncertainty in his own.

A chilly wind whipped through the pine trees, causing their needles to shiver. The air was filled with the anticipation of the frosty journey ahead.

As they made their way down the icy slope, the treacherous terrain proved to be a formidable adversary. Each step was a careful dance

to avoid slipping on the slick surface. The mountains whispered ancient secrets, their echoes mingling with the sound of distant avalanches.

Just then, a low rumble echoed through the mountains, causing the very ground beneath them to tremble. Willow's fur stood on end, and Sunny's heart pounded with fear.

"Sunny, do you hear that? It sounds like an avalanche!" Willow's voice quivered with alarm as the sound grew ever nearer.

Without hesitation, Sunny dashed forward, his heart racing in his chest. A few heartbeats later, the deafening roar of the avalanche thundered toward them, a relentless cascade of snow and ice. With an anguished cry, Sunny leapt toward Willow, pulling her into a narrow crevice between two boulders.

As the avalanche raged past them, its ferocity enveloped the mountainside in a swirling vortex of white. Willow clung to Sunny, their bodies pressed together as they huddled in the shelter of their refuge.

When the tumult finally subsided, silence descended upon the mountains once more. The only sound was the soft hum of the winter wind, carrying an air of both peril and resilience. They struggled, gasping at the cold as they fought their way to the surface.

"We're ok." Willow whispered, her voice filled with gratitude and relief.

Sunny let out a soft purr, his heart still racing with the intensity of their brush with danger. "We're in this together, Willow. We'll find our way, no matter what obstacles stand in our path." His voice trembled with his promise, and his gaze was sad but guarded.

Soon, you'll have to look out for yourself.

✧ Chapter 24 ✧

Don't forget to vote please, it really helps <33

They continued for the rest of the morning, the eagle's screeches growing, and so was Sunny's nerve, it seemed.

Why is he so agitated?

She mused to herself, looking sideways at him. She had begun to notice him constantly looking at the sky and behind them. His nerves were rubbing off on her.

He caught her looking at him and dipped her head guiltily at his guarded expression. They padded on in silence.

Sunny drew in a sharp breath, his body tense.

"What is with you?" Willow rounded on him.

"You've been weird since we left." She spoke softly.

"What's wrong?" She asked him, her eyes pleading.

"I'm just..." He seemed to be considering lying, and she raised a brow. He glanced at her apologetically.

"I'm just nervous. I've never been to this side of the mountains." She took a step forward, purring softly.

"You'll be fine." She promised. He smiled, his eyes narrowed slightly.

"Come on, lets get down to the lowlands, yeah?" She smiled, her breath whisping around her muzzle like a holy wreath. He nodded and padded forward, his eyes closed, and he breathed out slowly as he walked beside her.

She looked in concern at him, but before she could say anything, a piercing screech tore through the air, sending chills down her spine. Before she could react, a massive shadow swooped down from above, talons snatching him away.

"No, Sunny!" Willow's desperate cry echoed in the mountainous expanse as she launched herself into the air, claws outstretched. But another eagle, silent and swift, swooped down and seized her in its formidable talons.

"Willow, fight! Don't let it take you!" he called, his voice strained with fear and urgency.

As they were borne high into the sky, the mountains blurred beneath them, and the world spun with terrifying velocity. Every beat of the eagles' wings brought them closer to an uncertain fate, the wind roaring in their ears amidst their desperate cries. He yowled, struggling in the eagle's grasp. She held onto Sunny's eagle's legs, while her own eagle dug its claws into her rump, slicing into her thighs. She cried out, holding on fiercely. Looking into his pained, but determined eyes, she stared desperately at him. She could feel her own cold blood slowly seeping through her fur down her back legs, as the eagle gripping onto her hind with long talons tightened its grip, while Sunny's blood dripped from his pelt at an alarming rate.

"Let go, Willow."

"What? No!" She gripped tighter to the eagle's legs, and it squawked angrily, reaching down to bite her. She leaned her head backwards, narrowly avoiding its sharp beak. It snagged a tuft of fur on her throat, ripping it out viciously. She cried out as her head was yanked forward again.

"Willow," He winced, squinting at her through the pain. "You have to let me go. You have your whole life ahead of you."

"And you have yours!" She screeched at him. "I can't lose you." She struggled as her claws were slowly ripping the legs of the eagle that was pulling Sunny away. Her claws would soon come loose, she knew this. She closed her eyes for a moment, and when she opened

them again, she saw Sunny and realised how much she loved him and needed him.

The beating wings of the birds battered them violently, and they squabbled above their heads.

Sunny leaned forward as much as he could and licked her wet cheek. He then pressed his forehead to hers, and she could feel his tenseness as pain wrecked his body, his nerves on fire. His short, pained panting.

"I can't let you go, you're all I have." She sobbed into his bloodied chest. "Please, try for me..."

I said I wouldn't let her see me die. I'm keeping that promise. He ignored her plead, knowing if he were to get away, he'd never survive his injuries. Or the fall, which she might just survive if she were to escape soon, as the eagles were slowly gaining height.

"I love you." He said.

"I love you too" She stared into his eyes.

"Then please... forgive me."

Before even a mild confusion could set in her mind, Sunny growled in agony and determination. He lifted his paws to her shoulders and snarled as he used the last of his energy in a huge shove which sent her flying from the eagle's grip, and her claws sliced through his eagle's legs, feathers snagged in her claws, bleeding from the strain.

"Sunny! No!" She screamed, falling fast towards the earth. The last thing she saw before hitting the ground, was his soft, promising gaze, tearing her heart apart before she hit the earth, and her eyes closed.

✧ Chapter 25 ✧

Don't forget to vote please, it really helps <33

Willow padded inside the cave. All the sounds were muffled, and cats lagged, leaving a trail of fur behind them briefly.

She peered at them confusedly, before her head jerked up at the sound of a voice.

"Branch." A voice called. The voice echoed, the lower notes laying heavy in the air. Her vision turned to Leaf.

"I know you're upset, but you have to let it go. You can't change it."

His voice growled in her mind.

"I can try. Why would Stoneteller do this? Knowing the truth? Knowing what will happen? It's not fair, Leaf. It's not fair on *her*, Leaf. She doesn't deserve this. Why don't you get it?" He asked her desperately, and Willow felt a strong emotion run through her pelt as she looked at him.

"Stoneteller knows what she's doing."

Branch snarled, his eye still squinting from where Dandelion had slashed him earlier. He stormed out of the cave, Leaf calling his name. He ignored her, wanting to cool off. Willow trotted quickly after him.

He walked down the mountain, the wet mud sloshing under his paws. He walked with his ears flat, and head low against the rain.

Willow felt sadness and frustration, emotions that weren't hers.

She sighed.

"Branch, I-" She ducked her head as she heard a rustle in a bush.

Her gaze darted to Branch, who was pacing, fuming.

"Branch." He didn't turn to her. A twig snapped, and so did her nerve. She leapt towards him, standing in front of him. He had stopped pacing, stood still with his head low.

"Branch, there's something there, I-" She paused. *He doesn't know I'm here*. He lifted his head slowly, for a moment leaving a drowsy trail of eyes and ears. *This is a memory*. She stepped away, looking at him sadly. Suddenly, Sharptooth exploded out of the bush from behind her, in front of Branch. She ducked low automatically. Crouching she looked up in time to see Sharptooth leaping over her, and Branch's terrified gaze. He gaped as he desperately tried to scramble out of the way, baring his teeth in petrified anger. Sharptooth landed on him, crushing his spine with its huge paws. He screeched in agony, a strangled and terrible cry for help that would never come. Willow wanted to look away, but her eyes were stuck as Sharptooth leaned down and ripped out his throat. Blood bubbled at his mouth, and he made a guttural groan as his eyes glossed over. Willow looked sadly at his corpse. Blood drained from Sharptooth's canines, and walked away. She gazed at his, her mouth wide in anguish at his gruesome end. She collapsed in a heap infant of his stiffening anatomy, heat seeping out of it as his energy returned to nature.

Branch stirred, and Willow looked back at him suddenly. A glowing image of him pulled itself up from his body, which fell still as his spirit stepped away, panting.

He bowed his head, sadly looking upon his body. A bright light cast itself over the night, and Wind appeared, her fur flowing in a non-existent breeze.

"Branch." Wind called him softly.

"Wind!" He purred, and Willow looked at her desperately, hoping she could see her. She ignored her. It was only a memory after all.

"No time for greetings, I'm afraid, Branch. Willow and Dandelion are in danger. Sharptooth is heading for them. Go, save them. Willow *must* live!" Her voice spoke urgency, and Branch looked

worriedly up at her.

"But... I'm dead. aren't I?" He mewed sadly.

"Yes. But you can still make a difference. Go!"

Branch nodded firmly, and bolted out of the clearing, leaping over his broken and bloody body without a blink. Willow darted after him, following close behind. He sped ahead of her, and he seemed happy. He flew over any obstacle, his paws barely touching the earth. It was heavenly. A screech caught their attention, and he swerved towards the sound.

"Run Dandelion, run!" Willow heard her own voice, and she pricked her ears. She saw her own shape through the trees, running as fast as she could, Sharptooth yowling close behind. She watched as she tripped, and looked desperately up at Sharptooth.

I'll never get away now. She heard her own voice in her head.

She and Branch sped up. Sharptooth grabbed Willow, ripping her body and throwing her around. Sharptooth chased after the unconscious body like it was a toy, and was rearing, ready to bite her throat out when Branch burst from the trees, letting out a blinding blue-white light. Branch screeched wildly at Sharptooth, his legs spread apart and fur fluffed up as he flashed sharp, translucent teeth. Sharptooth squinted and glared at him, before snarling and running away from the body. Branch cantered forward towards her still body, crouched, and pressed his nose to her head. His nose slipped into her cranium, and he leaned back sadly. A silence-shattering whoosh blew their fur as a bright blue-white light lit up the clearing. They turned away, squeezing their eyes shut until it died down to a soft glow, and Wind appeared again.

"You did all you could." She murmured.

"Did I save her? Will she live?" He questioned softly, looking at Willow's reddened body. Wind didn't reply, just walked away, flicking her tail for him to follow.

"Come on, it's time to go."

"Go? Where?"

"The Tribe Of Endless Hunting, of course."

✧ Chapter 26 ✧

Don't forget to vote please, it really helps <33

Willow's ears twitched as a faint humming sound filled the air, drawing her slowly back to consciousness. She opened her eyes, and everything was white.

She lifted her head, and her ear-tips brushed cold softness. Her body ached terribly, pain throbbed through her hind legs, and she groaned, the sound muffled beneath the snow that had buried her.

She pushed up, her hind legs trembling. Pushing through the snow, her head popped above, and sucked in cold air. She looked around confusedly.

The cold stung her nose as she scented the air, pricking her ears as frosty mist wrapped itself around the sparce undergrowth.

"Sunny?" she whispered, the name heavy on her tongue as the sorrow of loss flooded over her. The image of her best friend being carried off by the eagle seared her heart, and the memory of his sacrifice sent a shiver down her spine.

"Sunny!" She screamed into the vast mountinous valley. She let out a sorrowful yowl, her heart beating rapidly with hope. But she knew she would have no answer.

"Sunny!" She screeched, her voice hoarse and sore. She cried out for him, feeling as if her heart were ripped into small peices, undeniably by the claws of fate.

She sobbed loudly, uncaring of anything around her. She cried uncontrably, panting and screaming and clawing at everthing.

"I hate you!" She roared, shrieking at his ghost.

"Why would you do that, Sunny? Why? *I needed you!*" She cried out

desperately, her words wisping out her mouth and being taken by the wind.

Willow stumbled through the thick snow, her heart heavy with grief. The mountain loomed above her, its jagged peaks casting long shadows over the desolate landscape. She stopped abruptly and let out a gut-wrenching scream, the sound echoing through the valleys as a mournful wail.

She collapsed to the ground, her chest heaving with sobs. She curled into a tight ball, her soft fur blending with the snow as tears streaked down her cheeks.

A distant howl of wind mixed with her cries, creating a haunting symphony of loss and pain. Willow's grief-filled moans resonated through the mountain, a heartbreaking melody that seemed to draw the very essence of sorrow from the landscape.

Minutes passed, and Willow's cries softened into a low, mournful hum. Her lament mingled with the wind, a wordless expression of her shattered heart. She took a shaky breath and closed her eyes, enveloped in the unyielding grip of grief.

Willow trudged down the mountain, her steps heavy with grief. The loss of Sunny weighed on her, a heavy burden pressing down on her chest. She wandered through the forest, the snow crunching under her paws as she searched for solace.

Finally, she found a quiet spot and with trembling paws, she started to dig. The snow yielded to her determination, and soon, she had fashioned a small burrow. Curling up inside, she sobbed, the sound echoing through the stillness of the forest.

As she lay there, a glint of grey caught her eye. With a heavy heart, she reached out and discovered a frozen rabbit beneath her paw. Her cry was loud, a despairing wail that filled the air, as she cradled the lifeless creature in her mouth.

She clutched the rabbit close, her sobs slowly giving way to exhausted breaths. The blizzard howled outside, a mournful symphony that matched the turmoil in her heart. Eventually,

drained by grief, she succumbed to sleep, the soft hum of the storm lulling her into a fitful slumber.

Willow didn't get up. She didn't talk. She didn't open her eyes.

She lay in the snow, freezing, shivering. She couldn't care less.

✧ Chapter 27 ✧

Don't forget to vote please! It really helps <33

Willow That Shines At Dawn's ears twitched. She opened her eyes, a cold mist surrounded her muzzle, and she lifted her head slowly, her eyes narrowed and sore with grief. Tears had stained her soft cheeks, which had hardened onto her face in long, dark streaks.

Willow peered down at her paws, and caught sight of the grey rabbit she had dug out the night before. She looked upon it, and twisted it around with a sniffle. She opened her maw, and set her teeth in it, all while shivering violently. She took a bite out of the cold hard flesh, struggling to rip off a chunk from the frozen corpse. she bit down hard on the body, tearing off chunk from the rabbits hindquarters. She she found it difficult to chew, and her throat clicked and her mouth refused to swallow. She forced it down, and soon realised how hungry she was. She ripped off more of the rabbits fur, ripping its side open with her claws and tearing off more bites.

After finishing the rabbit, she eluded the dugout, padding outside with a shivering anatomy. She looked about her, her gaze tracing the alabastic landscape. She stifiled a sniff, padding forward, down the mountain. She winced with every step, her muscles tense. Sadness Emanated from her pelt, the birds silencing as she emerged from the trees.

She would have to be careful and move slowly, but the determination to honor Sunny's sacrifice drove her forward.

Gradually, she began to make her way down the slope, her senses alert for any sign of danger. The wind whispered through the trees, and the occasional creak of branches echoed in the stillness of the mountains. The only sound that lingered in the frosty air was the sound of snow melting, a gentle sloshing and tapping that guided her down into the valley. She walked parallel to a stream, its gentle

flow trickling with it's sound resonating and bouncing off the walls on the cliffs, which were either side of her now, trapping her between tall, long walls, forever casting dark shadows upon her, yearning maternal warmth, stood frozen in time. They cocooned her, sheilding her from the worst of the wind, and she wordlessly thanked them, her head low as she followed the stream.

The ground had begun to level out, the stream having occasional and random pools of frigid water, before trickling down again. He feet hurt, and he ankles were throbbing. At least her thighs weren't bleeding anymore. She new she had to get off the mountains. she had to start afresh. She ventured lower, for hours, until at last, the snow stopped. It was still cold, but spring was coming fast.

It's been almost a year since i saw Dandelion. She thought, stopping abruptly, her gaze tracing the pale buds sprouting from the ground.

"And probably the last." She mumured, looking back up at the towering mountains.

I will never go back. The wind whistled, her old home beconing her, calling out shrilly tempting her to turn back.

She fought back against the lingering yearning for home, turning away. She bolted, running beside the stream, much alike the one she used to drink from after she lost Dandelion. She ran, blood pumping around her frozen body, and she strained her legs, galloping as fast as her legs could muster. She began to slow down, her legs aching from overextertion.

A vast forest approached, and she paused nervously at it's entrance, its rooty and flowery scent infusing her pelt.

It's already newleaf here? She thought, casting a glance at a cluster of newly opened daffodils. The sun had begun to dip, it's warm rays slowly dying. She stayed outside the forest, but curled up underneath a tree. A hoot whistled through the trees, but she took no notice. She was already fast alseep, a small, grey, exhausted bundle, wrapped around itself while the light dwindled in the air, before disappearing without a warning.

✧ Chapter 28 ✧

Don't forget to vote please! It really helps <33

Willow started awake, shaking and panting.

It was just a dream.

She rose to her paws, stretching luxuriously. A warm prey-scent emanated from the trees, making her mouth water. She got up, and groomed her pelt, spitting out small dried blood mangled with fur. She shook out her pelt, dust floated from it, residue from her mountain's sheer crumbling peaks. She continued to wash her fur, until it was soft and glossy once again. She sat beside the tree, peering into the forest with undisguised curiosity. Her tail twitched in annoyance.

Why was she so afraid? This could be her new home!

She allowed determination to overwhelm her, and she padded slowly into the forest. A cool breeze welcomed her, and she looked up, dazed by the dappled light sprouting through the trees. Birds sang harmoniously, and the ferns brushed against one another with gracing tenderness. She padded forward, new smells engulfing her with a passion. She breathed them all in, and somehow, knew this was to be her new home.

She had walked for a long time, and was now growing tired. She had caught the plumpest mouse she had ever seen, and ate it gratefully. It was just past sunhigh, and the sun breathed warm air onto all it's light touched. She found a sunny spot upon some rocks by a river, and settled down on one of his flat surfaces. She stretched out, enjoying the warmth soaking into her cold bones. She allowed herself to purr, the rapsy sound reverberating across the rocks, and closed her eyes.

She was awoken only an hour or so later, disturbed by a small

group of cats.

"Hey! Theres a cat over here!" A shout roused her, and she lifted her head sleepily. She saw three shapes bound over to her, two inquisitive, one furious.

"What do you think you're doing here?" Said a dark red-brown tomcat.

Willow stumbled to her paws, unnerved by the cat's hostility.

"Hey, take it easy, Redleaf. She looks hurt." Said a calico she-cat with amber eyes.

What a strange name. She thought to herself.

"It doesn't matter. *She's* on our territory!" He snarled stepping forward with a threatening glare.

Willow scrambled back, fumbling around with her legs still half asleep. The third cat leaped forward, stepping infront of Redleaf.

"Poppysun's right. We should take her back to camp, and see what Hazelstar has to say about this. Don't rush into a fight you might regret later." The she-cat eyed Redleaf, giving him a look that had a deeper meaning. A meaning Willow didn't know, and that she didn't care about.

"Fine." Redleaf growled. "But you can explain to Sandwhisker why we didn't attack, as we're *meant* to do, Tansyleap."

Tansyleap rolled her eyes. "You know Sandwhisker doesn't care for rogues. Plus, she's probably in Ravenshade's den again, she's always catching whitecough that cat, even in spring!" Tansyleap went silent. Poppysun pressed her nose into Tansyleap's neck for a heartbeat.

"Your mother is fine, Ravenshade always takes good care of her, doesn't she?" She pressed, smiling. Tansyleap smiled.

Redleaf groaned, flicking his tail.

"Are we going to stand here like moonstruck rabbits, or are we going to take this rogue to Hazelstar?" He looked crossly at the two she's. They rolled their eyes, but dipped their heads.

Willow stared at them, bewildered.

"What are you going to do with me?" She stood up tall, puffing out her fur. Redleaf snorted, walking away.

Tansyleap stepped forward with a reassuring glance at her.

"Don't worry, we won't hurt you. We'd like you invite you to our camp, so we can know more about you." She mewed with a sympathetic eye at her hindquaters, which had faint blood streaks.

"Yeah, don't worry! Most of Thunderclan's nice!" Poppysun leaned forward, pricking her ears at her with terrifying confidence. Tansyleap groaned, pushing her back.

"Will you come? I mean, Redleaf will probably come and drag you if you don't come on your own..."

"uh, okay then. What's his problem anyway?" Willow asked.

"Oh, he's just grumpy. Its not you. Everyones a bit grumpy after leafbare, they can't wait for newleaf." She stated, beginning to walk in the same direction as Redleaf had gone, and Willow followed his scent.

"I see..."

Poppysun burst forward. "Well, your lucky we found you, not *Riverclan*." She shuddered.

"Whats that?" She asked, tilting her head. Poppysun burst into laughter, and Tansyleap shoved her.

"Hey, it's not her fault." Tansyleap turned to Willow. "There are five clans, Thunderclan, where we live, Riverclan, Windclan, Skyclan and Shadowclan."

"Oh."

"Yep, we eat birds and mice and such in Thunderclan. Windclan eat mainly rabbits, they live on the moor. Skyclan also have forest, downriver, and eat the same things. Shadowclan has the marshes and pines, they eat frogs, lizards, mice, birds. And riverclan is just across the river we were by, and they eat just *fish*." Poppysun pretended to vomit silently. Willow eyed her, before turning back to Tansyleap.

"So... your like a tribe?" She querried.

"Umm, kind of. Do you have a clan, or a.. tribe?" She asked as they continued walking. Willow paused.

"Uh, no not really. I'm on my own." She replied quietly.

"Oh." Tansyleap didn't press, and she felt a gradual friendship growing.

Tansyleap continued to tell her all about clan life, about their ancestors, Starclan, which was very similar to the Tribe of Endless Hunting. The warrior code and more. They approached a gorse tunnel, guarded by a senior dark brown tomcat with golden eyes.

"Appletooth." Tansyleap dipped her head at the warrior, returned by the same greeting from him. When he lifted his head, golden eyes pierced hers, and she looked away.

He knew i was coming. She paused infront of the gorse tunnel. Tansyleap gave her a reassuring glance, and she followed her inside. It was dark for a moment, before a blinding light shone out of the exit, and she emerged, surrounded by light, engulfed in it, swimming in it, breathing it.

The light died down as she turned her head, squinting. When her gaze returned, she saw a large sandy clearing, full of cats, all different shapes, sizes, colours. Tansyleap turned to her slowly, angling her head with a proud smile.

"Welcome to Thunderclan."

✧ Chapter 29 ✧

Don't forget to vote please! It really helps <33

"Who's this?" a pale brown she-cat trotted forward, sniffing Willow with a hostile glare.

"No worries, Brambleheart, this is... oh! I don't know your name." Tansyleap looked apologetically at her. Willow dipped her head earnestly.

"My name is Willow." Tansyleap smiled, turning to Brambleheart.

"There you are." She chirped, but brambleheart didn't respond. She was stood up tall, her gaze fixated on something behind them.

Tansyleap turned, before dipping her head. "Greetings, Hazelstar. I assume Redleaf has told you about the rogue?"

"Yes, but not much." Hazelstar looked her up and down. She stood still, but her pelt crawled. She could feel the whole clan's gaze burning into her back.

"Where did you come across this rogue?" She asked, turning back to Tansyleap.

"On sunningrocks!" Poppysun chirped, peeking up at Hazelstar. Tansyleap looked at her sideways, clearing her throat.

"Her name is Willow!" She called to Hazelstar, who was walking away, a sandy she-cat with dark hazel eyes followed her, and a couple of other warriors, including Redleaf and Appletooth.

They disappeared into a small cave behind a large ledge. A large, black she-cat with white stripes and a white chest dipped her head at Willow before following them inside.

"They are going to discuss what will happen." Tansyleap hissed.

A tomcat cleared his throat, and Willow swivelled her head around to look. Her gaze caught a few friendly faces, but a few unfriendly. A blue-gray tom with faint stripes gave her a confident but friendly smirk, and lifted his head at her. Her mouth creased in an awkward smile, before her head swung around nervously as a different cat hissed at her, a medium brown she-cat with white tuxedo markings and dark stripes, her amber eyes glaring. The cats emerged, all stepping down the ledge apart from Hazelstar, her soft brown fur whisping.

"All cats old enough to catch their own prey, gather here beneath the highrock for a clan meeting!" She called out, and what seemed to be the entire clan emerged from dens, crowding around underneath the clan leader.

"A rogue was found by sunningrocks, and it had been discussed that if she'd like to, she may stay in Thunderclan for a trail." Disapproving murmurs spread like a wave throughout the clan, and she lowered her head.

"I know it is a new thing, but we are short on warriors and Riverclan and Shadowclan continues to press our boundaries." The mumurs died down, and a kit squealed,

"Mama, didn't you say rogues are evil and they eat kits that don't behave?" This was quickly hushed by a cream she-cat, casting an apologetic look at Willow.

"No, not all of them sweetie. See, that rogue looks very nice, doesn't she?" The queen murmured quietly. A little grey tomkit eyed her with a furrowed brow.

"But mama she's dirty!" The tomkit wrinkled his nose. The clan watched silently.

"Wolfkit don't be harsh! She's probably come a long way..." The queen cooed, giving Willow a nervous glance.

"Yes, i have." Willow padded forward with a sympathetic eye to the kit. "You see," She was talking to the whole clan now.

"I come from the mountains, up where its still snowing." The clan buzzed excitedly.

"Yes! With great rivers falling off cliffs." She meowed, hoping the clan wouldn't have heard about such a thing, and would be impressed. They seemed to be.

"With huge birds that can take cats up into the sky!" She paused, her heart burning.

"Have you seen it happen?" a small grey cat asked in disbelief.

"I have." She stopped for a moment, sorrow ripping her chest open. She prayed they would believe her, and let her stay. "And cats as big as the bushes surrounding this camp!" The clan gasped, and she nodded earnestly. They did seem to believe her as the clan burst into conversation.

Hazelstar, who had been watching quietly, called out.

"Silence, please!" The clan went quiet.

"We are short in warriors, and this rogue seems to have courage and strength, stamina the clan needs after this leaf-bare. All in favour of allowing the rogue Willow to stay, please stand."

Willow was amazed to see how many stood, leaving only a few older-looking cats and a young she-cat staying sat.

"Then it will be. Willow, please come forward." She did so, her head cocked in confusion.

"It is our way to have multiple names once they are earnt. Because you have had no training, you will be an apprentice. Are you willing to give up your name for an apprentice name?"

She shivered at how easy the transition had been. She was ready for a fresh start. "I am."

"Then from now one, until you recieve your warrior name, I name you Willowpaw. Your Mentor will be Stormclaw. Stormclaw, please step forward." Willowpaw twisted her head to watch the blue-grey

tom walk confidently towards her, and she looked down, embarrased for some reason.

"Stormclaw, I trust you will treat Willowpaw with respect. Pass on your courage and skills to her, and treat her as she was clan-born." Hazelstar gave her a brief smile, and she felt her nervousness shrink. *Poppysun was right. This clan is pretty welcoming.*

"I will, Hazelstar. Thank you." Stormclaw turned to her, and she felt her ears get hot. He leaned forward, and gently touched his nose onto hers.

"Hey, Willowpaw. Nice to meet you." He stared intensly into her eyes, and sent shivers down her spine. His eyes were a frosty blue, hawk-like, that felt like they might just claw out her own eyes if she wasn't careful. But Willowpaw smiled confidently, her gaze meeting his evenly.

"And you." She smiled, but looked around the clan nervously.

"Don't worry, you'll fit right in."

Willowpaw peered at his friendly smile, feeling more happiness than she had in a long, long time. She had found her new home.

✧ Chapter 30 ✧

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Paws beat fast over the earth, stopping for a moment, before continuing to thunder through the trees as Willowpaw leapt over a pile of leaves, the air still after the storm. She leapt at a small, pale grey-brown she-cat, green eyes flashing. Willowpaw easily flattened the female feline, squashing her underneath. A muffled squeal enamated from her pelt, and Willowpaw jumped off, squeaking in surprise. The pale brown she-cat stood up, huffing.

"It's not fair, Goosefern. Willowpaw's way bigger than me!" She complained to a white she-cat, who looked at her daughter, then to Willowpaw, then to a blue tomcat stood a little away.

"She's not wrong, Stormclaw. I mean, they're both as good as each other, but Willowpaw's the same age as you! It's not a fair fight. What do you think?"

Stormclaw furrowed his brow, looking at Willowpaw.

"I mean, it can't be long until they get their warrior assessments, but, take Tulippaw to train with the other apprentices in the Sandy Hollow. Me and Willowpaw will continue to train here." Goosefern dipped her head, flicking her tail for Tulippaw to follow as they bounded off into the trees.

"Attack me." Stormclaw lowered his head encouragingly. Willow crouched, her gaze fixated on his right shoulder. Stormclaw saw her point of aim, and she watched him slightly angle his stance accordingly. She flattened her ears, slitting her eyes. She remembered all her lessons, all the techniques she had learnt over the past three moons, and was now fully accustomed to the clan's way of life. She had even been to a gathering, where she was announced as a new apprentice. She bolted forward, leaping towards him. But instead of attacking him, she jumped over him,

pouncing on a great maple tree's roots, and ricocheted off one, leaping back at him with stunning force. She bowled him clear over, tumbling to the ground with an *Oomph*. She got ready to pin him, but he kicked her away, shoving her backwards. She circled him and ran at him from the side. He tensed, leaning towards her, but she ducked under him, running underneath his belly, turning around, and simply pushing him over with her paws, before pressing them into his chest, pinning him.

"How was that?" She asked, panting.

"That.. was good!" He remarked, pushing her off.

"I think it's time for your warrior assessment." Stormclaw gazed into her eyes with warm intensity. She didn't notice.

"Really?" She bounced on her toes. She whipped her tail, smiling at him.

"Yes." He purred, amused. "You've done amazing to settle in. I'm proud of you." He stopped, his gaze tracing hers. "I knew I liked you when I first saw you."

Willowpaw smiled at the strange comment.

"Thank you for being such a great friend, Stormclaw." He ducked his head, seemingly disappointed and embarrassed. Willowpaw's pelt itched with awkwardity.

"No problem." He seemed to have the same issue as they both looked at their paws.

"Race you back to camp!" She burst out, sprinting into the trees. *I'm happy here. I miss Dandelion, Sunny, and the tribe. But this is my home now.* She thought to herself, bounding through the trees. She looked up, birds soaring over the trees. Stormclaw caught up.

"Hey! Watch where you're going!" His alarmed meow brought her attention back to the ground, and leapt just in time to not crash into a fallen tree.

"Thats new!" She panted, slowing down.

"Must have fallen last night." He replied.

They approached the gorse tunnel, and ducked their heads and crawled in. A busy camp welcomed them, with a full freshkill pile, apprentences pulling dirty bedding from the elders den, and the senior warriors talking with the deputy. They approached, and warm gazes encouraged them closer.

"Sandwhisker, if you're not too busy, I'd like to chat." The other warriors mumbled at his informal tone, however the pale she-cat didn't seem to mind. Her dark hazel eyes glanced from Stormclaw to Willowpaw.

"I see." The she nodded in understanding. "Well, we can have that talk now, if you wish. Come." Stormclaw dipped his head appreciatively and followed Sandwhisker to a shaded part of the clearing.

Willowpaw stood, next to all the senior warriors, licking her jaws nervously. However, they greeted her with pricked ears.

"How is your training going?" A cat she recognised as Tigerfern asked, but before she could answer, another cat asked,

"Do you think you're ready for your warrior assessment?" The she-cat almost bounced on her toes, and Willowpaw looked unsurely at the small group, not knowing who to answer first.

"Hush Poppysun, you're scaring her with all that excitement!" He smiled, pushing her gently. A soft-looking tom smiled at her. *Owlface.* She remembered his name.

"My training is going very well thank you, I'm enjoying learning about your way of life." She looked in confusion when a few of them laughed, and she tilted her head.

"You know, you don't have to talk so formal around us! We're just like you, just stiff and sore!" Flamewing, an elder, gave a raspy cough, and Brambleheart chuckled.

"He's right, we just act like that infront of Hazelstar and Sandwhisker." Spoke Crowflight, a well-spoken but good-humoured

tom.

"Oh, okay then!" Willowpaw purred. She felt at peace with the seniors, they were kinder then the younger ones, and some of the other apprentences. Tansyleap said they would warm up eventually.

"Willowpaw!" A voice called, and she turned around. She saw Pouncepaw and Dovepaw, beckoning her with their tails.

"Come and eat with us!" Pouncepaw pricked his ears.

"Okay, coming!" She looked back at the warriors apologetically.

"Go ahead." Owlface purred, and she flicked her tail, dipping her head, she trotted over to the other apprentences.

She heard positive mews from the warriors behind her, and couldn't hold back her smile.

✧ Chapter 31 ✧

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A heartbroken wail interupted her meal, and the warriors and apprenences around the clearing, stood, their ears flattened and hackles raised. Willowpaw's eyes were wide, and she looked omniously to the gorse tunnel, her heart pounding. Forestpaw, Rainpaw and Tulippaw emerged with their mentors, Goosefern, Brambleheart and Cloudstorm. And another cat, who lay limply upon the warrior's shoudlers. It was Featherdust, an elder. Willowpaw gasped in shock, and rushed forward, along with the rest of the clan. Mothlight, a queen, gently pushed her kits back into the nursery, her fur fluffed out. A warrior rushed up to the highrock like a lizard scuttling across sand, and disappeared into the leader's den. Hazelstar, Stormclaw and Sandwhisker appeared quickly, rushing down the ledge and approaching Goosefern.

"Featherdust...? What happened?" Hazelstar demanded, flicking her tail for the warriors to lay her on the ground. Senior warriors began to push the crowd back, which was made up of mournful cries and anxious mews.

Ravenshade rushed over, immediately assessing the elder's body. Willowpaw squinted and tried to peer over the the warriors shoulders, but to no avail.

"Come on." Pouncepaw meowed to her. "We'll find out later, Hazelstar will call for a clan meeting when they figure out what happened." She nodded, and the apprentences crept into their den, anxiously waiting as the clearing died down, and the elder was moved into Ravenshade's den. The other apprentences burst into conversation, but Willowpaw didn't join in after a glare from Rainpaw. Pouncepaw caught it, and after giving Rainpaw a scolding glace, shuffled closer to her.

"Ignore him. He's just downright grumpy, its not you." He turned to

look at Rainpaw, who rolled his eyes and turned around, curling up.

"Thanks, Pouncepaw. You've always been so nice to me." She mewed, flicking her tail at the younger cat.

"No worries. I mean, you're like, twice our age sooo..." He chuckled and she laughed.

"True enough, but you've been here longer then I, so I try to keep the peace with everyone." He nodded.

"Good idea." He replied, crouching down into a loaf, his eyes slitted. She took the hint and rested her chin on her mossy nest.

"All cats old enough to catch their own prey, gather beneath the highrock for a clan meeting!" Hazelstar's saddened but determined voice rang around the clearing, rousing her from her dreams.

Her fur bristled as she wondered if they would find out what happened to Featherdust.

Stormclaw's head popped through the entrance, his gaze somber, yet pleased to see her.

"Come on. There might be good news too." He winked, and his stormcloud-like fur disappeared from veiw.

She stood, her legs tingling as the blood began to flow through them again as she stretched them out. She emerged from the thorny branches of the apprentences den, stepping out into the clearing to find most of the clan already gathered around Featherdust's body, her lifeless fur groomed by her relatives. She joined the crowd, sitting at the back, looking easily over the other apprentences's heads, and some of the warriors. She was slightly larger then most of the warriors. She had guessed tribe cats were and needed to be bigger then forest cats.

"Ravenshade has assessed Featherdust's body, and has revealed the way in which she died." The clan waited silently, a small sob coming from a warrior near the front.

"Featherdust was attacked." Gasps spread throughout the clan, but

awaited more explanation.

"Before she died, she was fighting. Last night, she had gone out to use the dirtplace, and didn't return. We think Featherdust was ambushed, and fought bravely. There was grey fur in her claws, so we have that evidence, but unfortunately we can't distinguish the scent. However, Ravenshade suggests the reason for her death, is being struck by the falling tree, and the ambusher fled." Wails echoed through the clan as cats called out her name in distraut, followed by angry screeches.

"Whoever did this, I'll end them!" Said Tulippaw, casting a bereaved glare at every cat, eventually landing on Willowpaw's soft pelt. Tulippaw's eyes narrowed on her, and she padded forward confidently, a stomp in her stride as her tail whipped back and forth. Willowpaw met her gaze evenly, even being much older then her. She understood Featherdust to be her grandmother.

"I wonder who could have done this." Tulippaw circled her, and the rest of the clan backed off, watching.

"You see, because no sensible clan cat would go out in that kind of storm, *especially* to another clan's territory. No *clan* cat, would be stupid enough to do that." There was an awful snarl in her voice.

"And even our elders could easily fight off a kittypet, and no rogues *dare* enter our territory." She said, thoughtfully.

"So, I wonder. Are there any new cats?" She looked around mockingly.

"You know, I do wonder who, in Thunderclan territory that night, with grey fur, would attack under cover of darkness, and leave an elder to die? And of course we can't distinguish the scent, we're so used to the scent of ourselves, aren't we?"

Willowpaw bared her teeth.

"Are you accusing me of murder, Tulippaw?"

Tulippaw sniffed, and looked offended. "Well, who else would do something so un-clanly?" Willowpaw narrowed her eyes.

"I'm as much clan as you are."

Tulippaw bounced forward.

"You wish, *rogue*."

Willowpaw snarled, crouching as Tulippaw taunted her. Stormclaw caught her eye. He was stood behind Tulippaw, his eyes narrowed, tail swaying. His eyes glared into Tulippaw's neck, and his eyes flashed a warning. *She doesn't know what she's getting into. You're more clan than she ever was, and ever will be. You're a better fighter then her, don't be afraid to show her that.*

She gave him a brief nod, her eyes flashing anger at the apprentice who sniffed at her, her eyes gleaming.

"Stupid little rogue, no family, no home." She hissed as she circled her.

"This is my home." Willowpaw declared, baring her teeth.

"You don't belong here, and you know it. You don't *deserve*, to be here!" Willowpaw let her words slide off her back. Stormclaw flexed his claws behind her, and Hazelstar, who had come down from the highrock to watch, laid her tail on his spine. She heard her mumur;

"This is for Willowpaw to sort out." Stormclaw narrowed his eyes but obeyed, and Willowpaw then understood.

This was suppossed to be dealt with with claws. She crouched, and the two apprentences circled each-other, Tulippaw's mocking stare was making her claws itch. Tulippaw leapt forward, but ducked away last second, attempting to confuse her. She noticed Tulippaw's claws were retracted, and Willowpaw scoffed. *Does she really think this is a game? Battle training?* She slit her eyes, and jumped forward, pounceing onto her hindquaters, digging her claws into her shoulders savagely. Tulippaw squealed, at first in pain, then in anger as she tried to twist around, throwing Willowpaw off, who landed on the dusty earth with a *thump*.

Tulippaw flew at her, a hissing ball of fur as she tried to grab her shoulder, Willowpaw stuck on her back with Tulippaw ontop.

Willowpaw kicked out, stabbing her in the belly with her claws like a wild hare, and Tulippaw eventually backed away, crouching as blood dripped from her stomach. Willowpaw's shoulder had a small bite mark, with a few pricks of crimson seeping through her fur, but no heavy injuries. Goosefern meowed loudly, trying to push through the crowd, but stopped when Tulippaw hissed at her.

Tulippaw's eyes flashed as she scanned the watching crowd, her fur bristling with embarrassment. Tulippaw once gain ran forward, twisting around in the air to scratch her, and her claw caught above her eye, and Willowpaw flinched back, holding that eye closed as blood dripped into it. Willowpaw seethed as Tulippaw glared at her. Jumping at her, grabbing her by the scruff and flinging her over, and she tumbled to the ground in an ungraceful manner, hearing a snap in her hind leg.. Tulippaw stumbled to her feet, yowling in outrage and pain as she limped. She went to attack again, leaving once of her back legs off the ground. Willowpaw tried to shove her back, but cried out when Tulippaw's claw slashed at her chest, causing a gaping hole. Willowpaw sucked in a breath as blood poured out of it. Her legs buckled, and she fell into a loaf, her head low. Stormclaw bounded forward, crouching beside her, while Tulippaw yowled and whined in the background.

"Willowpaw?" He said worriedly.

Willowpaw struggled to breathe, the cut had peirced her trachea, and she coughed, blood dripping down her forehead and off her nose, and a thin stream of blood trickled from her mouth. Tulippaw groaned in the background, and Willowpaw peered up, but found a larger crowd around herself than the apprentice. *How's that for I don't belong here?* She had proven her point, but now she really needed Ravenshade.

"Get me Ravenshade, now!" Stormclaw shouted at a warrior, and she laid her head on the ground, her chin wet with a crimson liquid.

"Thats fine, just rest Willowpaw. Hold on, just hold on. Ravenshade's coming, Ravenshade's-" His voice faded away, she blacked out.

✧ Chapter 32 ✧

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Willowpaw peeked her eyes open, feeling too tired to lift her head, but looked around with her eyes. She was in Ravenshade's den, Tulippaw in a den opposite, with Stormclaw lying next to her.

"Hey, good morning." He mewed softly, nudging her. She blinked, looking up at his deep ocean eyes.

"Oh. Why am I.." Her voice faltered as her chest throbbed, and she looked down at her stained guard. *Oh.* She thought.

"Yeeah." He sighed. "But Ravenshade patched you up good, see? You've got some uh, uh, herbs- on there!" He stammered, quickly realising he knew nothing about herbs.

"You fought well." He continued. "That was just Tulippaw's luck, you see. When you pushed her back, her paws were all over the place trying to get steady. Your body didn't have time to move away." He explained enthusiastically.

"Also. As soon as you've healed up, you'll be taking your warriors assessment." He meowed loudly, flicking his tail at Tulippaw. "You'll be the first one to get their warrior name in moons! Since I got mine, actually." Willowpaw pricked her ears excitedly.

"Tomorrow?"

Stormclaw chuckled, laying his tail on her back. "Perhaps a bit later. At least the cut wasnt too deep. Ravenshade said you'll be back in the apprentice's den by tonight." He grinned.

Willowpaw looked down. "How did the clan take me and Tulippaw fighting? Is Hazelstar angry?"

He blinked at her.

"No, why would you think that? you stood up to a bully, and stood up for yourself and what you know is right. Believe it or not, most of the clan's on your side." He looked around, and leant down to her face. "In fact." He said most professionally. "Hazelstar, has postphoned Tulippaw's warrior's assessment by a moon!" He whispered, chuckling. She gasped.

"Really? Poor Tulippaw.."

"Hey! Forget she accused you of murder, then attacked you?" He reminded her stiffly.

"I know, I know. I just know what losing someone is like." She looked away. She felt his stare burning into her forehead, knowing questions were bubbling up inside him. She had never really talked about her life before she came to the forest, and wasn't going to start now.

"Will you bring me something from the fresh-kill pile?" She asked quickly, before he could say anything. He looked taken aback for a moment, but the expression quickly disappeared. He blinked carefully, looking softly at her face.

"Sure, sure. Anything in particular?" He asked quietly, sensing what she was really asking. She shook her head no, looking up at him as he got up to leave, with soft olive eyes.

She yawned, squinting her eyes. She peered from the rim of her nest. She caught sight of Tulippaw in her nest, asleep, her back leg wrapped in herbs, but she was fast asleep. She felt a twinge of sympathy for Tulippaw.

She pulled herself up, feeling almost no pain, just a dull ache if anything at all. She padded outside. She squinted as late afternoon light warmed her face. Once her eyes had adjusted, she looked around the camp to see the last patrols setting off, seeing Stormclaw's tail disappear through the gorse tunnel, she felt a little better. She knew he would have questions, as he always had, but she wasn't ready to talk about it yet. She noticed Sandwhisker signalling to her, who was sat with Ravenshade. She padded over, pricking her ears.

"Greetings, Sandwhisker, Ravenshade." She dipped her head earnestly.

"Greetings, are you feeling much better?" Sandwhisker asked, her dark hazel eyes showed genuine concern. Willowpaw smiled, sitting down.

"I am, thank you, thanks to Ravenshade." She glanced at the medicine cat, who was observing her with a keen gaze. Willowpaw twitched her whiskers, wondering why the Medicine cat's expression seemed so purposeful.

Ravenshade turned to the deputy.

"I'm running low of some herbs, after treating Tulippaw and Willowpaw. Would you mind if I take Willowpaw out to fetch some fresh herbs?" Ravenshade wrapped her tail around her paws. Sandwhisker cast Willowpaw a sharp glance.

"Is she fit for it? Don't you think she should rest...?" She looked uncomfortable. Ravenshade cleared her throat abruptly, speaking firmly.

"Who's the medicine cat, Sandwhisker?" Ravenshade reminded her quietly.

"I know, but..." Sandwhisker continued, and Ravenshade sat up straighter, while Willowpaw sat quietly.

"She will be fine." She insisted firmly. Willowpaw flicked her gaze from cat to cat, sensing a difference between them, secrets to be uncovered. But now wasn't the time, and dipped her head at Sandwhisker.

"She's right, I do feel much better!" She mewed cheerfully. Sandwhisker dipped her head, but looked unconvinced.

"Alright then. Lets set off before it starts to get dark." Ravenshade got to her paws, flicking her tail on Willowpaw's back, lightly. Willowpaw followed her out of the gorse tunnel, looking back on Sandwhisker just once, who sat, watching them. She had a confused yet unemotional expression laid on her face.

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Willowpaw bent, reaching to the lowest part of a stem she could, and pulled out a horsetail plant.

"Is hiss ood?" She mumbled around the frizzy leaves, angling her ears at Ravenshade, who was just standing up with a bunch of marigold. Ravenshade nodded, understanding and padded back to her, dropping the herbs at her paws.

"Perfect. I just need to find some goldenrod, and then we can head back." Ravenshade seemed tense, and Willowpaw wondered if it had anything to do with how Sandwhisker was acting. Willowpaw gathered enough courage to ask her.

Ravenshade sighed as green leaves whirled around, the sun winking out behind a cloudy sky.

"This isn't to be repeated, though I believe most of the clan is guessing it, but Sandwhisker isn't doing too well." Willowpaw nodded slowly, taking in her words, ignoring the sudden cold air washing through her pelt.

"She's just become.. strange." She continued as they slowly walked through the trees, bright evening light blasted them and warming their pelts.

"Like, almost unconscious. Making strange decisions, arguing with simple things with no explanation, like back at camp. I can't figure out the problem, and I feel like I'm failing the clan." Ravenshade mewed sadly. Willowpaw looked at her in alarm, pressing her shoulder gently to hers as they walked.

"You're not failing the clan. You're doing all you can to help her, I'm sure." She tried to reassure the black she-cat. Ravenshade looked

unconvinced but grateful.

"Maybe.."

The wind picked up suddenly, and Ravenshade peered up at the sky, a skeptical look in her green eyes.

"A storm's on its way. A big one." She meowed urgently. The sky, at her words, seemed to roar, and a drizzle began. Ravenshade flattened her ears, hissing at her.

"Gather your herbs, quickly!" She lowered her head to reach her plants, but jerked it up again a moment later. Her eyes widened as she stared blindly at the sky. Lightning flashed, once, twice, thrice, and a fourth time, and as Willowpaw watched, her pupils didn't shrink. Without warning, the sky blasted icy rain onto the earth. Willowpaw darted forward, head-butting her. Ravenshade's pelt shook as she stood tense, while the wind whistled past them, blowing their fur the wrong way. Ravenshade gasped, crouching with a scared look.

"Ravenshade, we have to go!" She cried, the wind almost pushing her over. Ravenshade turned to squint at her.

"When sand is carried on by the blue storm, the sand will become the rainwater, and at dawn, Willow will catch the breath of wolf."

Willowpaw awaited her response, the wind howling terribly, both their pelts thick and heavy with water.

"An omen." She meowed darkly, her eyes clouded.

"But a prophecy." She stared brightly at Willowpaw as dug her claws into the earth, as the wind roared in her ears. Ravenshade seemed unaffected by the turbulent weather.

Finally, she came about her surroundings, and yelled.

"We have to go! Quickly, before it's too late!"

Ravenshade gathered her herbs, and galloped back towards camp. Willowpaw rushed after her, tilting her head towards the worst of

the wind. They raced back to camp, leaves and small branches whipping them, Willowpaw squinted, feeling sharpness sting her eyes.

Is that sand? She thought, opening her mouth to taste the rain. Closing her mouth, she felt the gritty texture crunching between her teeth. The sky a dark, swirling grey and blue river, and a dirty yellow-brown rain, making the air thick. Trees creaked, crying out at they were battered by the storm, unable to run for cover. They burst into camp, the wind shoving them inside. They ran past the warrior's den, seeing the the warriors and apprentices huddled, apprentices in the middle, warriors on the outside. She ran past the empty apprentice's den, and ran towards the medicine cat's den, to drop off the herbs. She dropped the herbs into the den, which were held down by rocks just small enough for them to push over to hold the piles down. They both burst out, and headed for the warrior's den to join their classmates. As they passed the nursery, a voice called out to them.

"Willowpaw!"

She slewed to a halt, squinting and peering around for the source of the sound. Movement in the nursery caught her eyes, and she darted forward, Ravenshade following close behind. The entered, escaping the worst of the wind and rain. She brought her eyes open the queens and their kits, and Tansyleap! She dipped her head, pressing her nose to Tansyleap's, glad she was ok.

"We were in here when it got bad, and everyone rushed into the warriors den. We're tried and tried to get their attention, and I can't leave because the kits will freeze." She angled her ears at a cuddled bundle by her belly.

"Got it. Me and Ravenshade will stay here until the storm's over."

Dawnheart peered down at Wolfkit, who was sleeping by her paws. A burst of wind blasted into the nursery, pushing Wolfkit closer to her. Dawnheart closed her eyes and sneezed from the sand, blocking Wolfkit's way into the dip of the nest. With a grunt the small kit fell backwards with his paws flailing, landing on his back and rolling over, close to the entrance where the wind was

screaming terribly, rocks and branches darting in and out of view.

He scrambled to his paws as Dawnheart and Willowpaw got to their feet, too late to jump up to save him as he was sucked out.

✧ Chapter 34 ✧

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Dawnheart yowled in alarm, stumbling wearily to her paws. Willowpaw yelped as his amber eyes disappeared, the wind carrying him away. Willowpaw shoved Dawnheart down roughly, knowing she would be faster to save the kit's life, as Dawnheart was an older queen. She raced out of the Nursery, and was almost blind to the sandy rain. She was immediately battered by the force of the storm, but knew she couldn't go back. She scanned the deserted clearing, before running out of camp, calling out to the lost kit.

"WOLFKIT! WOLFKIT!" She cried, imagining the sweet, sassy kit all alone. *Or dead already.* She ignored the thought and searched in every bush and thicket around camp, checked the dirt place. *Nothing. Where could he be?* She questioned as she ran out of camp, lost in her surroundings. Suddenly the wind dropped, and leaves floated in mid-air, before dropping the the floor. She stared around, confused. Light broke out, and she squinted at the sheer brightness of it. *I'm... I'm in the eye.*

The storm continued to rage in a wide circle around her. She didn't even know where she was, she couldn't recognise this destroyed part of the forest. She heard a wail, and pricked her ears, standing tense.

"Wolfkit?!" She called out, spinning in a circle as she willed him to call out to her.

"Help!" A tiny yowl sounded from inside the storm, which was racing back towards her. She narrowed her eyes, bunched her muscles and leapt back into the storm. She was immediately disorientated, and tried her best to keep her ears as tall as she could in the strong winds.

"Help me!" She heard Wolfkit's terrified voice just over the storm,

and tried to head in the direction, water up to her ankles, and willed herself to canter towards the sound. She caught sight of a small bush, just about clinging onto the earth. Admist the small thorny branches was Wolfkit. She accelerated forward, but stopped dead at a creak, despite seeing Wolfkit's weak, scared gaze peering from the leaves. The bush was at the base of a great copper beech, which creaked ominously in the wind. It's leaves were all but gone. With a great crack, the tree came toppling down, cracking its branches on other trees, as if trying to save itself. Wolfkit howled in fear, and as she noticed, he was trapped in the bush behind entangled vines. She raced forward, running as fast as she could, her muscles already burning and shaky from the overexertion. The tree loomed closer, and she looked up at it as it plummeted towards her. Her mind whirled like the leaves attacking her, wondering if she could go back. But she saw Wolfkit's petrified eyes and her heart hardened. She leapt for the bush, feeling the tree brush her tail. She leant down as she ran, shoving her muzzle through the brambles and biting down on the first soft thing she felt. She bit down hard, and he squealed in pain as he was yanked through brambles. She closed her eyes to protect them while thorns ripped through her muzzle as she dragged the kit out. She heard the last crack at the base of the tree, and she surged up, soaring over many tail-lengths, just to escape a terrible death for both her and the kit. She stumbled, yelping but not letting go as the ground disappeared beneath her feet. She swung her head and Wolfkit to her chest, wrapping her paws and body around him to protect him as they plummeted down a steep slope, created by a landslide. She held him tight as she rolled down a jagged hill, ripping roots and sharp rocks jutting out from soft, loose mud. Willowpaw cried out in pain, and briefly heard Wolfkit whining. She was dropped off a ledge into a fast flowing stream, full of sticky watery mud. It was too deep fro her to stand, and with mud coating her face she couldn't see a thing as she struggled with Wolfkit now in her jaws. She choked on the mud, unable to find a bank. *We're going to drown!* She thought as she paddled around blindly, the wind blowing water onto her face and Wolfkit. She tried to throw her head, trying to get Wolfkit to get onto her shoulders. He understood, shaking terribly as he dug his claws into her shoulder, climbing onto her back where he crouched. She choked on the water, coughing and reaching out her paws, desperately searching for a bank. Finally her claw struck soft

mud, which disintegrated almost instantly under her touch. She growled and kicked forward in the same direction. Her claws brushed a harder mud wall, still underwater. She could make out a dark shape looming towards her. Her nose bashed into the wall, and to her dismay she found that the wall surged up out of the water, and was a tail-length high above water. She panicked, pacing in the water. But her energy was running out, and she knew they would soon drown if they didn't get out. She leaned forwards, and found a flimsy root. *Thats as good as it's going to get.* She narrowed her eyes and grabbed onto it with her teeth, and lifted herself out of the water a bit.

"Hold on!" She spoke through chattering teeth. She felt Wolfkit's grip tighten, and hoisted herself up, leaning on the facade of the mound. She raised a paw, and dug it into the earth above her head. She clenched her muscles and pulled, driving her back legs into the earth. Her eyes watered at the pain of Wolfkit's claws sinking deeper into her flesh. She rested her chin on the top of the dirt, sighing for a moment, her neck tensed as she only used her paw and her head as an anchor to keep herself up. Thunder growled, and she snarled back as she pushed up, getting her shoulders up, her belly, and at last her legs.

She collapsed, her muscles trembling from the overexertion, Wolfkit falling off her back, unhooking his tiny, sharp, needle-like claws. She panted on her side as Wolfkit hurried over, leaping over her back to crouch beside her belly. Lightning flashed, striking a tree. Energy sparked into her, and she stumbled to her paws as a gust of wind tried to shove her back down, violently. She persevered, her legs trembling from the effort as she grabbed his scruff, choosing a direction and speed stalking forward, keeping close to the ground to avoid flying branches.

She ran onwards, dodging trees as they suddenly loomed infront of her, as she couldn't see a tail-length in front of herself. She kept running, the only thought in her mind was herself and Wolfkit's safety.

The violent storm of sand and rain lashed at Willowpaw's fur as she struggled to make her way through the thick undergrowth. Her heart pounded in her chest, her paws slipping on the wet ground as

she desperately searched for cover. Lightning crackled overhead, illuminating the sky in a blinding burst of light as thunder roared in the distance.

Suddenly, a loud crash echoed through the forest as a bolt of lightning struck a nearby tree, setting it ablaze. The heavens opened, the sky lighting up with a blast of brilliance, blinding her briefly. A deafening boom shattered her eardrums, the sound reverberating in the air, followed by a large branch came crashing down, striking Willowpaw on the head and knocking her to the ground. The world spun around her, darkness threatening to consume her as the rain pelted down on her fur. She squinted, writhing in pain on the ground as Wolkit took cover in her belly, crying out wildly, assuming her dead. Her ears rang with a high pitched squeal that blocked out all other sounds, making her eyes water as her nerves froze, and she lost feeling in her paws. She clenched her jaw through the pain, but fell unconscious.

✧ Chapter 35 ✧

Don't forget to vote please! It really helps <33

Through the haze of pain and disorientation, she heard a faint voice calling her name.

"Willow." Her ears twitched, and her eyes opened barely. She closed her eyes again. She had accepted her fate. *I'm sorry Wolfkit, I tried.* She said to the small, unmoving bundle cuddled beside her, his face pressed into her belly, a vain attempt to shield himself from the storm. She could tell he was alive, by the telltale tiny shivering erupting from his pelt.

"Willow." The voice called again, slightly stronger. *What?* She opened her eyes again, only to be met by bitter winds. *Leave me alone...*

"Willow!" The voice called, strongly with a sense of urgency. Her eyes darted open as she recognised the voice.

Dandelion? She asked desperately. *Is it really you?* The voice did not respond, instead, Dandelion only urged her again.

"Get up, Willow, you have to get up!" His voice grew louder in her mind with each word, a desperate plea for her to rally. His voice cleared away the terrible ringing, and she felt blood flush through her veins, and she flexed her toes.

With a surge of determination, Willowpaw forced herself to her feet, the world spinning around her. Wolfkit yelped in surprise, then with pleasure, then again with fear.

"Come on Willow, you don't have much time! I believe in you, you can do this." Dandelion's voice urged her on.

Ahead, she saw a faint light shimmering through the trees,

beckoning her onward. In a daze, she picked Wolkit up swiftly, and followed the light, miraculously avoiding the debris being flung about by the fierce winds.

Following his guidance, she staggered forward, her senses heightened by the adrenaline coursing through her veins. She searched desperately for him, chasing the tiny flickering light ahead, but never caught sight of his golden pelt. Finally, a giant mass of darkness loomed before her, and she stopped in her tracks. Snakerocks.

Dandelion's light had gone.

"Inside. Don't worry, you'll be safe here." Dandelion promised, urging her inside.

Willowpaw trusted him, and with a last burst of strength, she crawled inside, wrapping herself around Wolfkit as they huddled together, seeking refuge from the raging storm.

"Dandelion?" she whispered hoarsely, but there was no answer. He was gone, his presence fading like a wisp of smoke in the wind, tearing her heart apart all over again.

Exhausted and battered, Willowpaw and Wolfkit collapsed into one another. Willowpaw succumbed to the embrace of sleep, the howling wind a mournful lullaby in the background.

✧ Chapter 36 ✧

Don't forget to vote please! It really helps <33

A leaf scraped against the ground softly, but loud enough to tickle the hairs on the inside of Willowpaw's ears. She slowly opened her eyes, just a peek. A shaft of light filtered through heavy boulders, and a gentle breeze swept the leaf up, and it twirled in the air for a moment, before whipping out of the small cave.

She sighed as her eyes adjusted, and turned her head to look around at where she was. She winced in alarm as pain throbbed everywhere. She was reminded of the dreadful storm, and she looked in alarm to her side, finding a dark grey and white bundle of fur. She pushed her nose into him, praying that he was alive.

Please, please..

Wolfkit's tired orange eyes peeked up at her sleepily. She sighed with relief, closing her eyes for a moment. She jerked her head up, and looked attentively to the entrance to the cave. She widened her eyes, her ears twitching back and forth.

"What is it?" Wolfkit asked quietly.

She didn't reply, listening intently. Faint calls drifted towards her, and she stood, her lips twitching at the pain.

Wolfkit let out an *oomph* as he rolled over, and scrambled to his paws, wincing at his own wounds, though he hadn't many. She stepped outside, closely followed by Wolfkit. The calls were getting louder, and she pricked her ears and called out hoarsely.

"Hello!?" Her voice cracked until her voice was a sore whisper. She coughed, trying again to no avail. Wolfkit, who was watching her, tilted his head back and let out a yowl.

"Louder." Willowpaw encouraged him. He cried out again, his high-pitched voice ringing throughout the forest. They waited a moment, and heard a shout.

"Over here!" She collapsed with relief, she wouldn't let Wolfkit see how weak she was. One side of her face was coated in blood, and deep cuts adorned her muzzle. Her body felt bruised terribly, including a bloody graze on her shoulder, where a sharp rock had caught it while she was falling down the slope created from the landslide. She heard the voices growing louder, and looked towards the sound with pricked ears, and tired eyes. A patrol burst through the bushes, consisting of almost the entire clan, lead by an extremely worried Dawnheart, who yowled and bolted towards them, stumbling in her anxiousness to reach her kit. She trips, tumbles and works herself to her feet, and speed-trotted forward, her ears and head low.

"Dawnheart!" Wolfkit cried out, whining. He had been so brave, but after seeing his mother, he couldn't hold it in any longer.

The rest of the patrol rushed forward, seeing her state.

"Is it really you?" Dawnheart gasped, sniffing her kit tenderly, before pulling him close and licking him all over. Dawnheart turned to her, and looked at her with moist eyes.

"Thank you, thank you Willowpaw. You saved my kit's life. He owes you his life, I can never thank you enough for this." She trembled, looking over her pelt, embellished in bruises and cuts.

"Oh Willowpaw.. how can I ever repay you, he would be dead without you." She gasped at the thought, and tears streamed down her face.

"Yes. He would be." Said Hazelstar, with a proud gaze, and sorrowful glint in her lenses. Willowpaw was too tired to wonder why she looked so dishevelled. Tansyleap ran to her side, and Willowpaw tried to purr a greeting to her best friend. They touched noses.

"Oh Willowpaw.. look at you..." Tansyleap exclaimed, very upset

with her state. "And Wolfkit's hardly got a scratch on him!"

"No." Spoke Hazelstar, staring intently at Willowpaw. The small patrol behind her looked at her expectantly. Willowpaw tilted her head while Tansyleap responded.

"No.. Hazelstar?" She asked.

"Not Willowpaw." The warriors looked at eachother, shrugging.

Hazelstar stood tall, her eyes shining and turned and stood beside her, facing the small patrol. They waited.

"I, Hazelstar, leader of Thunderclan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down upon this apprentice. She has worked hard to earn this name, and I should have seen earlier that she deserved it from the moment she walked into camp as a loner." She looked at Willowpaw with a soft gaze as she stared brightly up at the leader, unbelieving.

"She has trained constantly to understand the ways of your noble code and I commend her to you as a warrior in her turn. Willowpaw, do you promise to protect this clan and uphold the warrior code, even at the cost of your life?"

Willowpaw looked around with owl-wide eyes, first looking to Tansyleap, her best friend. Then to Stormclaw, who beamed at her, and nodded warmly, his blue fur bedraggled from the storm. She turned back to Hazelstar, whom was watching her expectantly. Willowpaw breathed in, feeling a sparkle trickle through her veins.

"I do."

"Then by the powers of Starclan, I give you your name. Willowpaw, from this point on, you shall be called Willowdawn. For the dawn we found you, protecting a small kit with your life, and to keep a part of your old self, who made you who you are today. It is important to not forget those who made you. Willow, shining in her own blood she had spilt to protect a life other than her own." Willowdawn gasped. *Willow that shines at dawn. My name.. was a prophecy? All along?* She grinned widely at the revelation. *And*

Ravenshade's prophecy.. "When sand is carried on by the blue storm, the sand will become the rainwater, and at dawn, Willow will catch the breath of wolf."

I'm Willow. And the breath of wolf.. Wolfkit! And I saved his life.. so.. what's Sand, and Storm?

"Starclan honors your courage, kindness and selflessness. We welcome you as a full warrior of Thunderclan. Hazelstar leaned forward, and rested her muzzle on top of Willowdawn's. Willowdawn turned her head to lick her shoulder. Hazelstar stepped back, and raised her head, and shouted.

"Willowdawn!"

Tansyleap, Stormclaw and Ravenshade joined next. It was custom for those closest to begin shouting first. Each cat would decide when to join in.

"Willowdawn! Willowdawn!" A few by few, the rest of the clan joined in until the entire clan was chanting her name. Her heart swelled, and she beamed at the clan, full of the most incomprehensible joy she had ever felt.

"Willowdawn! Willowdawn! Willowdawn! Willowdawn!"

✧ Chapter 37 ✧

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The clan eventually died down, and Hazelstar cleared her throat to make another announcement. Willowdawn looked at her.

"Unfortunately, we must also break some sad news. During the storm, Sandwhisker rushed out of the warrior's den, confused. No one had time to stop her." She paused.

"Riverclan found her body in the river, and have returned her to us. Her body is waiting in camp for her burial ceremony. However, since I have done one ceremony here, I may as well do another." She searched the crowd, and every cat looked around, wondering who she was looking for.

"Stormclaw, step forward." The clan gasped, and some of the senior warriors grumbled under their breath, something about him being too young for the role. He ignored them, and stood before Hazelstar, his tail quivering with anticipation.

"I say these words before Starclan, so that the spirit of Sandwhisker may hear and approve of my choice. Stormclaw will be the new deputy of Thunderclan."

The dots joined. *"When sand is carried on by the blue storm, the sand will become the rainwater, and at dawn, Willow will catch the breath of wolf." Sand.. Sandstorm, her role was carried on by the blue storm.. Stormclaw! His fur is almost blue, and sandwhisker became the rainwater. The river! She drowned..*

The clan began the chant, and Willowdawn feebly called his name, her voice hoarse. *And Willow will catch he breath of wolf... I saved Wolfkit's life...* she lifted her head to see Ravenshade rushing over.

"Don't stress yourself, you've been through quite a rough night."

Willowdawn wanted to continue chanting for her former mentor, but knew Ravenshade was right, and respected her, and she stopped.

The chanting died down, and Hazelstar spoke again.

"We will return to camp for Sandwhisker's ceremony. Stormclaw, would you like to lead?" She angled her ears to the clan, with a slight smile creasing her face.

Stormclaw looked pleased and grinned, before clearing his throat, and nodding sharply. He lead the cats towards the camp, while Hazelstar stayed back with Willowdawn. Ravenshade hesitated.

"I'll bring her back to camp, don't worry. See to Wolfkit, if he even has any injuries." She looked sideways at Willowdawn. Ravenshade nodded, and caught up with the group. Soon, Willowdawn was stumbling beside Hazelstar, making their way back to camp slowly. She had to ask.

"How did you know?" She questioned. Hazelstar tilted her head.

"How did you know about my name? When I came here, I told everyone my name was just Willow. How did you know?"She repeated and Hazelstar continued walking, pondering how to answer.

"I received a message from Starclan. Along with Ravenshade's prophecy, which I'm sure you already figured out." She let the silence fill for a moment.

"In fact, I had a very special message from a member of another group's ancestor. Can you guess who?" Willowdawn looked down at her paws, before glancing up in awe.

"S-Stoneteller?" She inquired.

Hazelstar nodded. Willowdawn looked down once again. *That means.. Stoneteller must have died. I wonder who the new Stoneteller is. I hope Feather is doing ok, and Leaf..*

Hazelstar's voice roused her from her thoughts. 'You've had quite

the journey, hey?"

"Yes."

"And you've lost a great many cats that were close to you?"

"Yes.. I.. I have." She recalled Dandelion's guiding voice, leading her to safety. Maybe she had imagined it. She pictured Sunny's soft blue gaze. She sighed.

"Hm." Hazelstar looked at Willowdawn's longing expression, and her brows furrowed as she made a decision. Her eyes flashed a knowledgeable grin. "Well, you might find that it's not as many as you think." Hazelstar spoke very softly, and very quietly. Willowdawn lifted her head.

"Huh?"

Hazelstar didn't respond. She cleared her throat, and continued walking, leaving Willowdawn to ponder. What could she possibly mean? That doesn't even make any sense. She shook her head. They approached camp and let the silence fall around them. The entered, and saw a crowd of cats already mourning Sandwhisker. Her body lay in the middle of the clearing, wet, definitely dead, with sticks and leaves sticking out, and a few scratches on her pelt. But cats had already started to groom her, cleaning her thoroughly. Willowdawn hobbled over to join the ceremony, but was stopped by Hazelstar.

"No, you need to rest." She summoned Ravenshade, who trotted over, nodding.

"Come on, lets get you to my den. You must be awfully tired." She meowed sympathetically. I *am pretty tired.*

"But, wont Sandstorm-"

"Sandwhisker won't mind at all. She would want you to rest. Go now." Hazelstar smiled, and wafted her away with her tail, and headed towards the clan to begin the ceremony. She walked with Ravenshade to her den, and got settled in a nest, the soft moss feeling like heaven on her aching bones. She settled down, resting

her head on her paws while Ravenshade went to get herbs from her store. She felt numb, all the sounds muffled as she felt herself drifting to sleep.

She heard in the background Hazelstar calling out the traditional verse repeated for the dead during the burial ceremony.

"May Starclan light your path. May you find swift running, good hunting, and shelter where you sleep."

Cats began to tell short stories about her life, or their favourite things about her or memories with her.

Their quiet, mourning voices lulled her to sleep, which she found with satisfying ease. A proud gaze of orange eyes. My father. She smiled inwardly, and let sleep find her waiting, while Ravenshade patted herbs onto her sore, dust coloured pelt.

✧ Chapter 38 ✧

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Willowdawn opened her eyes, but didn't move. She looked around Ravenshade's den, her lenses scanning the den. Her gaze caught Ravenshade's dark pelt. She was fast asleep in a nest near her. She yawned, and felt her head aching. She shifted in her nest, feeling her legs sting. She sighed, and listened to the branches stirred by the gentle breeze. She shifted her weight slightly, to get more comfortable. Ravenshade jerked her head up, stumbling out of her nest.

"Whoah, Ravenshade it's alright. Go back to sleep." She mewed to the half asleep she-cat.

"Are you sure?" Ravenshade murmured dazily, swaying tiredly on her paws. She must have been up most of the night tending to her wounds.

"I'm sure." She purred.

"Okay, alright. Wake me if y..." And she was asleep. Willowdawn cast her a loving, grateful glance. Ravenshade was a good medicine cat. Willowdawn paused, to make sure she was asleep, before standing up, her nose wrinkling at the pain. But she had dealt with worse pains, she was sure. She limped from the medicine den to the camp, and was welcomed by a weak but warming sunlight. Cats were busy rebuilding the camp, patching the dens with sticks and leaves. In the long run, some of the damage the storm had done would be helpful. She looked around camp, and saw the apprentices in a small huddle, eating their sun-high meal. She waddled to the fresh kill pile, grabbing a small rabbit for herself. She was starving. She hadn't eaten since the morning of the storm. Turning towards the group of apprentices, she paused. *I'm a warrior now. Will they be embarrassed to sit with me? What if they are jealous?* She shook away her needless worry. Of course they'll still be friendly with me. Only

my name has changed, not me. She walked over, stumbling every other step. Embarrassing. Pouncepaw turned to look at her, and meowed a greeting, getting up and trotting towards her.

"Willowpa-dawn! How are you? Here- let me take that for you." He leaned towards her, and took the rabbit from her jaws, and padded beside her towards the group.

"Are you okay?" He asked.

"Yes, I'm doing okay actually." She mewed.

"What you did was really brave. I don't think I could ever do that." He confessed at they approached the group, who nodded, agreeing.

"Me neither." Said Dovepaw.

"And me..." Stated Forestpaw, who glanced apologetically up at her. The group paused in silence for moment, before Tulippaw, Rainpaw and Forestpaw meowed in unison;

"We're sorry." They blinked up at her with guilty-round eyes. Willowdawn glanced at Pouncepaw. He shrugged.

"For being unkind to you." Said Rainpaw.

"Yes." Echoed Forestpaw. "You're actually really nice, and brave. We were just jealous. We just didn't want a rogue coming in and messing up all our plans." Rainpaw gave Forestpaw a shove, furrowing his brows at the tom. Forestpaw rolled his yellow eyes, before catching Willowdawn's eye and looking down,

embarrassed again.

"I'm sorry Willowdawn. For being mean to you when you did nothing wrong, and accusing you of killing Featherdust." Tulippaw apologised, looking down at her paws, expecting a scolding, and the two tomcats did the same.

"Thank you all for apologising. It was not the welcome I had hoped for, nor the welcome I expect you to give anyone else. But I forgive you, and I hope we can all be friends now." She said firmly. She let

the silence fill for a minute, before they all laughed at the serious talk, and even Forestpaw seemed to smile with a real smile. They began to eat, and all shared their experience of the storm, with the conversation ending with them all looking up at her in awe as she told them how she saved Wolfkit's life, and almost lost her's on multiple occasions.

"Whoaahh!" Rainpaw said to finish.

"Thats amazing." Said Pouncepaw, purring.

"Yeah!" Exclaimed Tulippaw.

Stormclaw's mew rang around the clearing.

"All members old enough to hunt their own prey, please gather for patrols."

"That'll be us." Dovepaw sighed.

"Thanks for eating with us, Willowdawn." Pouncepaw dipped his head, his fair green eyes flicking over her.

"Thank you for letting me join you all." She mewed, staying sat while they spoke their pleasure, and watched them walk away, with Tulippaw staying behind. Willowdawn tilted her head at her.

"My leg. Ravenshade said It's not healed enough for training yet." She grumbled.

"Well, you've got me in camp all day to keep you company." She smiled, flicking her tail warmly. Tulippaw allowed herself an awkward but pleased smile.

"Great." She grinned.

Willowdawn purred, and turned her head as she noticed a cat approaching. It was Stormclaw. She called a greeting to him as he walked over.

"I'm... going to go check on the elders." Tulippaw meowed thoughtfully, and padded over to the the elder's den, with a quick

glance back at her, before trotting off.

"Hey." Willowdawn meowed to him, watching him walk around her, and settle into a comfortable sit beside her.

"Hello." He smiled. "How are you feeling?" He asked, peering close at her. His eyebrows twitched at her bruises.

"I'm okay, actually. Ravenshade is taking good care of me."

"Thats good to hear. Congratulations on your new name. It suits you." He grinned.

"Thank you, I could hardly believe it. And... you were chosen to be deputy? Are you kidding me? That's amazing!" She exclaimed, beaming at him. "You deserve it."

"Oh, well I don't know about that, some of the senior warriors don't like the idea, because I'm considered too young for deputy. Do you..." He glanced around, lowering his head with a serious expression.

"Do you think I'm doing a good job?" He whispered.

"Yeah! You're doing amazingly, Stormclaw." She assured him.

"Really?" He seemed unconvinced.

"Really." She purred, leaning against him for a moment. "The clan looks up to you. You'll be a good leader too." She lifted her nose.

"Oh wow... I never thought about that. I can't imagine Hazelstar ever.. you know, dying. Forever, I mean." He said.

"It would be hard to live up to her, she's such a good leader. The elder's say she's the best leader they've been lead by personally. And, she's a favourite among all the clans." He began to worry himself.

"Hey, you've got a long way to go yet, no point worrying over it now, is there?" She looked him in the eye. He sighed.

"I suppose not." He paused, watching some of the warriors rebuilding the nursery. They paused in silence, enjoying the weak sun on their backs. It was falling now, the sun. It would soon be coming up to nightfall.

"I best go help them repair." He got up to leave, but looked unsurely at her. "Will you be alright on your own?"

Willowdawn raised a brow.

"Uh- I just mean- with your injuries. I-I know you can handle yourself-" He stammered, growing hot under her gaze.

Her stare increased, leaning back.

"I- uh..." He glanced around nervously.

Willowdawn burst out laughing.

"I'm just teasing you! Yes, I'll be okay on my own, thank you." She grinned at his wildly confused and exasperated expression.

"Phew, okay. I'll uh, I'll see you around, hey?" He said as he began to walk away, looking back at her for a moment, the lowering sun highlighting his features. She smiled, nodding.

"Sure. See you around, Stormclaw." He narrowed his eyes in a soft smile, and turned away.

She yawned, tired. Her ribs ached from talking, the bruises tingling. Ravenshade said she'd be back to normal in a half moon, but for now, she wanted to go back and rest for the night.

When she arrived at the den, Ravenshade was sat, looking down at the ground, unmoving.

"Ravenshade?" She hesitated.

"Oh." She looked up, blinking. A smile broke her statue-like expression when she saw who it was.

"Willowdawn. How are you feeling?" She asked.

"I'm feeling pretty good actually." She announced, pricking her ears as she felt an itch on her shoulder. She whipped her head around to gnaw at it, carefully avoiding a soggy bruise.

"That's good to hear. I'll have to put some more herbs on you though, before you settle down." She warned.

"Thats fine." She stepped towards her nest, and sat up in it, while Ravenshade brought over a small bundle of herbs.

"This might sting." She cautioned, and Willowdawn replied with a short nod. She wrinkled her nose as she began to chew up the herbs, before patting them down on her scratches.

"Do they taste bad?" She distracted herself by asking her questions.

"They did when I was first apprenticed. But you get used to it. You have to." She laughed, wiping residue on a minor cut from her paw.

"All done." She meowed, stepping away. She brought over a small mouthful of dewy moss.

"Here, drink this." She placed it down gently, so the precious droplets didn't drop onto the sandy floor. Willowdawn murmured her thanks as she padded away, the sky growing dark, tiny pinprick stars starting to appear in the purple sky.

Her cuts were really stinging now, she guessed she didn't feel it much last night, because she was so exhausted.

"Ravenshade?" Her head popped out from her herbstore, a big crack in a large rock.

"Yes?" She replied.

"Could I have something to help me sleep? These cuts are really stinging." She complained.

"Of course, here." She dipped back into her story, reappearing in a moment with a folded leaf. She put it down infront of her. The leaf unfolded and revealed three, tiny seeds.

"What are they?" She asked, looking up at her.

"Poppy seeds. Don't worry, they don't taste bad. Go on. They'll help you sleep." She smiled down at her. Willowdawn licked up the three seeds, giving them a brief crunch before swallowing them. Ravenshade awaited a response to them.

"Not bad." She said, shrugging.

"Good. Now you get some sleep, you'll need it to heal properly." She announced, lifting her tail as she padded away, taking the leaf with her, and placing it back in the store. She seemed to be staying in there, sorting herbs or something. She was already beginning to feel drowsy, and lay her head on her paws, her sleep undisturbed by dreams.

"Sleep well, Willowdawn." Ravenshade murmured.

✧ Chapter 39 ✧

Don't forget to vote please! It really helps <33

She heard a gentle rustling of leaves, and lifted her head, blinking with a sleepy expression. Pouncepaw looked at her in alarm.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to wake you." He said, after dropping a plump vole in front of her nest.

"Its fine." She mumured, the hair along her spine flattening along with her ears as she yawned.

"Thank you, for this." She nodded at the vole.

"No problem, I thought you might like warm breakfast." He smiled, turning to leave.

"Do you have to go?" She pricked her ears. He nodded.

"I have border patrol. Sorry, I'll come visit you afterwards, though." He promised.

"Okay... have fun, and thanks again. That's really kind of you." She said appreciatively of his kind gesture.

"Of course. Goodbye, Willowdawn." He ducked his head to squeeze through the fern tunnel.

"Goodbye, Pouncepaw." She smiled for a moment, before turning to her vole. It was still warm. She tucked in, relishing its soft musty taste. She finished it off, licking her chops pleasurably. She looked around for Ravenshade. *She must be out. She works so hard. She doesn't get enough credit.* She thought to herself.

She heard another rustle, and looked up, expecting Ravenshade, but was met with excited amber eyes. *Wolfkit.* She grinned, flattening her ears and leaning forward to touch noses with the kit. Dawnheart followed him inside, looking cautiously around.

"Greetings, Dawnheart. How are you?" She dressed the queen more formally. Dawnheart looked flustered.

"I'm doing well, thank you. How are your wounds? Is Ravenshade taking good enough care of you?" She asked quickly.

"I'm doing ok, actually, and Ravenshade is taking very good care of me, thank you for being so thoughtful as to pay me a visit. It's a bit boring in here, I'm afraid, Wolfkit." She said in a sad tone to Wolfkit, who was sniffing around the den. Dawnheart straightened up, clearing her throat.

"Wolfkit." She said through gritted teeth. He looked up, and licked his chops at her tone, but bounded over happily. Dawnheart raised a brow as he sat politely in front of her.

"We wanted to formally thank you for saving Wolfkit's life, which he owes to you. We will be forever grateful, and if there's anything we can ever do to return the favour we won't hesitate. Will we, Wolfkit?" He said sternly to the young tom, who had began daydreaming, looking at a spiderweb on the dirt wall. He looked up suddenly.

"Yes. Thank you Willowdawn." He said, dipping his head, looking back up at her with owl eyes, brightly peering at her as if she was a hero. She purred in amusement at the little tom's funky personality.

"It was worth it. I would do it all again." She had already grown fond of him, since they first met. Dawnheart sighed, smiling at him. She breathed in strongly, straightening up again.

"Well, we don't want to bother you. We'll be on our way now."

"Awwh." Complained Wolfkit.

"Come on, you can come see her again later." She said firmly, turning towards the exit. "Goodbye, Willowdawn. Say goodbye

Wolfkit." She chided.

"Bye Willowdawn!" He meowed, bouncing on his toes.

"Goodbye Wolfkit, Dawnheart. See you soon." She smiled softly, yawning again.

The poppy seeds hadn't quite worn off yet. She rested her head onto the rim of her nest, sighing and closing her eyes. Her dreams were alive, bouncing and running at full speed, and her heart raced with the excitement, adrenaline making her legs tingle, but she was too fast asleep to move, only the subtle twitching of her eyelids were the only telltale sign. She ran over the mountain scape with her best friend.

A faint rustle disturbed her. It was Tansyleap, the crisp bedding crunching under her paws. Willowdawn lifted her head, looking at her with a warm look in her eyes. Tansyleap stood inside the den, just to the side of the entrance. Willowdawn noticed the evening sunlight dappling through the leaves, a gentle wind shifting the tiny branches against each other. It was warm, the light golden. Her senses were on high alert, and she didn't know why. She looked back at Tansyleap, who seemed to have an excited yet controlled gaze, her eyes beaming at her. Willowdawn blinked, wondering if she was imagining it. She wasn't. She wondered what she could be so pleased about. She was about to ask, when her ears swivelled around to a slight shift of weight outside the den.

"You have a visitor, Willowdawn." Tansyleap spoke very softly, stepping slightly to the side, a beam of sunlight flashing into the den. Willowdawn pricked her ears in understanding. *Another visitor, thats all.* She brought her paws up to her chest again, and raised her head expectantly, ready to greet whoever had come to visit her.

The camp felt deathly quiet as the stranger emerged through the fern tunnel, though she felt she could hear a ladybug walking up a stem, she could only focus on the tiny sounds inside the medicine den, and just outside it. The world seemed to be holding its breath. But she didn't notice. A golden paw emerged, followed by a faintly striped leg. Then, a paler golden chest.

She narrowed her eyes, the sunrise light making the rim of the figure bright, with the body of the cat dark. The silhouette made it hard to work out much detail, and identify the cat. A pair of eyes shone from the shade of the silhouette. She tilted her crown, not recognising the pair of orbs immediately. She thought she would have been able to recognise everyone in the clan by now. Golden amber eyes stared into hers. She unsteadily got up from her nest, standing in the soft moss.

Those eyes. She breathed in slowly, softly taking a step back. She knew where she had last seen such eyes. She didn't want to believe it, incase it was a dream. The eyes seemed to read her expression, and seemed stare harder into her heart, willing her to believe it. She sucked in a breath as the figure emerged, a sturdy, handsome tomcat. A sight for sore eyes. He had broad shoulders, a muscular pelt with a stern but remorseful gaze, pelt adorned in scars, including a scar snaking under his eye, which reminded her of a sick cat she had swiped at moons and moons ago, while protecting Sunny. She stood, tense. She didn't blink as he came closer, his eyes locked onto hers. Everything around her blurred out, and she could only hear her own eccentric breathing, and see his soft orbs. She exhaled sharply, her legs trembling. He stood, just a whisker-length from her face. She stared into his eyes, searching them.

"Dandelion?"

The end.

✧ Author's Note ✧

Wow.

That was a long, tiring journey. I just want to say thank you so so much for all my followers, anyone who voted or even just read my book, and especially all my biggest supporters who were with me reading and giving me feedback along the way.

This book was my dream to write two years ago, and while writing the original, real book, I decided to write this one for fun, based on warriorcats and made a fanfiction. I didn't think the it would be as difficult as it was, as i had to rewrite the entire book, change lots of names, settings, everything. even the way its written, changing from wolves to cats is difficult.

you can't imagine the pride i felt finally posting that last chapter, i almost cried. yeah i know thats a bit silly but this journey has been massive for me.

Its a relief to finally bring my book to a close, but I really am going to miss my characters.

SPOILER!!

(They'll be back in book two, with some new ones!)

Thank you all for being a part of it with me and my characters.

[image]